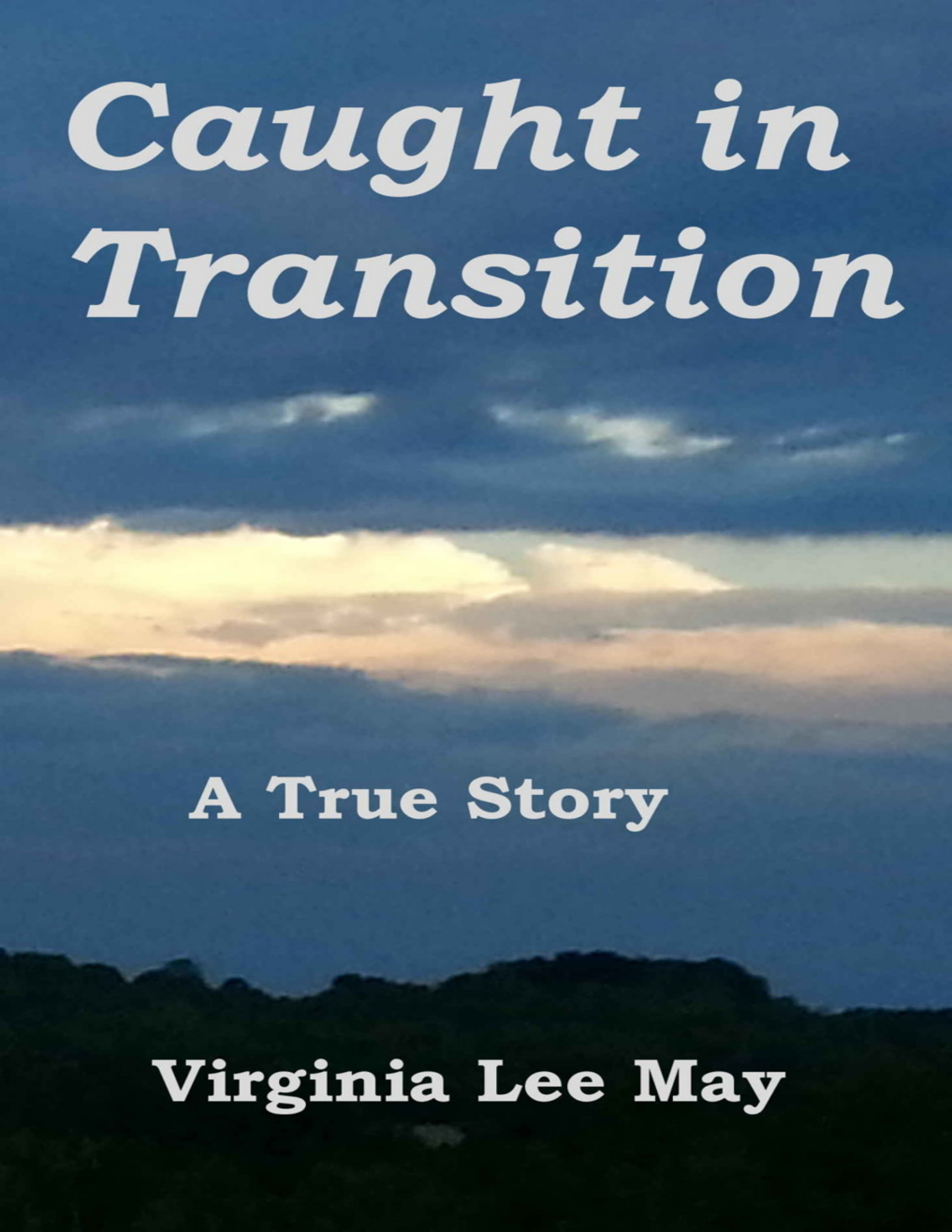
Caught in Transition
A True Story
Virginia Lee May

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Caught in Transition

by Virginia Lee May

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FIRST EDITION

Dedication

I want to thank my family for their love and support through our transition, as well as the writing of this book. I want to thank my sister for always being there and believing in me.

I especially want to thank the love of my life, because without you there would be no book.

Preface

This is a true story, and it’s my story. The events shared may be foreign to you but became the world in which I found myself living.

What I have learned is to sift through the complexities of my life and discern which were valued and which were not, and therefore needed to be overcome. Sacrifices may be needed to keep what is good, or to rid your life of what distorts it’s goodness. Some sacrifices you make may demand more from you than you ever thought possible.

The choices you make will change you, and you will become stronger than you ever thought you could be.

CHAPTER ONE
2011

The person I fell in love with was a tall, long haired man who defied convention and definition. He wore the black leather jacket and rode a motorcycle, but he still had the heart of a poet. He was dissolving before my eyes. I feared he would be gone forever.

The Shock

Days often pass by in an unremarkable fashion. The sun rises and sets, we live our routine lives in a routine fashion. Today was not going to be that kind of day. A shift in my world that I could not prepare for was already underway.

In general my husband acted differently from most people, but during the past couple of weeks he was even more different. I knew he always took vitamins but I had begun to notice that he was taking more pills more often. Why would he take pills in the morning and then more again in the evening? After a few weeks of this I finally reached the point where I couldn’t stand it anymore and thought it was time for a talk.

“Why are you taking so many pills? What are they for?” I asked him. He hummed and hawed and finally said that he wanted to increase the sensitivity of his breasts. Okay, I thought - where did that come from? Why would a man want to increase his breast sensitivity? It didn't make any sense to me.

“What do you want to do, do you want to be a woman?” I asked with a smile.

“The thought has crossed my mind,” he said and trailed off.

That was weird, but it got me thinking and I couldn’t stop myself from asking, “If you could take female hormones, would you?”

His answer was “Yes.” What the hell! I was shocked.

My eyes flooded with tears. I cried as I felt myself collapsing inside. My world was crumbling. I felt anger, sadness; I was hurt, and frustrated. I wanted to hug him and hold him so tightly, but at the same time I wanted to push him away from me. What the hell? Why now? I didn't know whether to cry or lash out at him with words of anger.

I didn’t know what to say. I feared that the husband I loved and respected was going to turn into an effeminate male. How could I keep that respect for him now?

I wouldn't have minded him wearing two earrings or clothing that was a bit more colourful and bright, but I had a really hard time with the idea of him wearing makeup. Seriously, I thought, what fifty-three year old man is going to look good all dolled up like a woman?

Didn't we have a good life and a happy marriage? Wasn't I a good enough wife? Then I thought maybe this was just a passing phase - I mean he had already bought the little red sports car, and a motorcycle. Maybe this was just a silly midlife crisis kind of thing. I soon found out that not only was it not going to pass, but it was soon going to begin consuming our lives.

A few nights later my husband turned out the bedside light and turned to me in the dark.
“I don't believe I can carry on living like a man - I know I'm a woman and I can't keep pretending,” he said.

I lay there in the dark with those words echoing painfully in my mind. “He's kidding - he's got to be kidding ,” my mind replied to each echo. “Why would he believe that?” This person who I fell in love with thirteen years before was now telling me he could no longer be the man I knew him to be. I felt stunned, utterly helpless, as tears rolled silently down my cheeks. Why was this happening to me? This didn't happen to girls from south St.Catharines where I grew up. This happened to other people.

“Its okay - we'll work this out.” I whispered softly and I held onto him tightly. Could I hope to stop time and keep him together as he was?

In the morning his late night comment was the elephant in the room. We walked softly around each other, no one wanting to set the other one off. I missed our easy going ways, now it felt like we had to walk on eggshells, in case we upset the delicate balance, inviting an avalanche of emotion that could tear us irretrievably from each other, forever.

My husband, Steve, left for work at 7:15 AM. I kissed him goodbye and sighed. I couldn't believe what was happening and I didn't want to accept it. I felt like someone had sliced my heart out. I remember getting myself a coffee and sitting on the couch thinking that we'll never again be able to dance in public, ride on our motorbike together, hold hands walking in the park or kiss. Everything this society, this heterosexual society allows, we could no longer do. I had to change his mind because we couldn't live like that.

It would be ridiculous for Steve to imagine that we could go on with our lives, when what he was suggesting wasn't our life. It sure as hell wasn't mine. I had fallen in love with a man, married a man and raised our children with a man - that was my reality. The idea of him becoming a woman and acting as if we were still the same married couple was ludicrous!

Steering Away from the Rocks

Life in general is always changing, in flux, constantly moving and taking us along for the ride. There are always obstacles to overcome as well as moments of complete joy.

I hoped to find an alternative that I could persuade him towards. Maybe he just wanted to be more in touch with his feminine side or maybe he just wanted to wear lingerie or pantyhose around the house. I could live with that. Part of me wanted to call my sister and cry on her shoulder, while the other part of me wanted to crawl in a hole and never come out. Every evening for the following two weeks Steve and I talked. Some nights I'd talk and he'd be silent, while other times he'd talk and I would sit and cry.

Life still continued around us with no one being the wiser. My daughter and her partner came and spent the weekend. My son and his girlfriend dropped in. My best friend celebrated her fiftieth birthday and we smiled through it all - the perfect married couple.

Steve suggested that a therapist that specialized in gender issues might help us to find our way together. He wasn't exactly sure which choices were right for him to pursue and needed guidance as well. He made an appointment with a therapist and went to see her before I did. This way he could explain where he felt he was and where he thought we were, so we could get some help and have our life together work.

Along came January 28, 2011 and Steve went to see the therapist. This therapist had worked before with transgendered people. I was hoping he'd return with good news, for example, he just wanted to be treated like a woman not really be a woman, or at least have evidence that a rock had fallen on his head and it was all a dream. But no - Steve returned and told me he was a woman, trapped in a world that didn't see him that way because he was living inside a man's body.

What does one say when one's husband tells them they are a transgendered person? I didn't even know what that meant. I called him a transgendered male - but found out later that would be a woman wanting to be a man, so the real term for him was transgendered female. Writing those words made me feel sad and brought tears to my eyes. Has that term been around forever, or was it something new - a new label for people?

Talking to myself was getting me nowhere so I made an appointment to see the same therapist on February 3rd. I hated her on sight. She was cool, detached, and the one person validating Steve's feelings. I can't remember what was said, but I do remember crying at the end of the appointment and she never even offered me a tissue. I came home feeling so alone and embarrassed. How could I possibly stay married to someone who wanted to be a woman? What would my family say? What would the neighbours think? I was filled with so much pain. The pain he created in me was tremendous. I truly loved him and I couldn't understand why he was doing this to us. Why was he doing this to me? I knew in my own head that sounded selfish, but my own head was the only place I had to go.

Thoughts of suicide played out in my head; if I wasn't here I wouldn't feel all this pain. These thoughts popped in and out daily, but when it came down to it I just couldn't kill myself while my mom was still alive. Some days I wished Steve would kill himself so my pain and sadness would stop, and then he could come back in his next life as a woman.

I loved him, I loved him with all my heart, but I couldn't love him enough for him to stay a man. It was unthinkable to me that he wanted to be a woman. I really thought I could change his mind and was heartbroken to learn it wasn't possible.

The snow kept falling as did my tears when I saw two new pairs of long dangly earrings on his dresser. In my head I told myself, "I can handle this," because no matter what he wears he is still my Steve. But when I see physical manifestations of his femaleness I cry out of sadness, frustration, and anger.

The tears changed nothing and the play back and forth between us continued. It was a badly choreographed dance that we fell in to. Neither wanted to upset the other, but I know he just wanted me to embrace him. I knew that embracing him meant I had to also embrace his need to change, and I just wanted him to stop - just stop - I wanted everything to stop.

A New Woman in the House

It was in February 2011 that Steve began living life as a male at work and a female at home. He decided he was going to call himself Sophia (Sophie for short). As soon as he got home from work he put on a skirt, jewelry, a wig and makeup. Steve looked okay for a six foot one inch male wearing three inch heels; at least he knew how to walk well in them. I hated the name Sophie (it made me think of the movie Sophie's Choice) and I didn't think it suited Steve at all. I don't think I ever called him by that name throughout this entire time.

February 14, 2011, Valentine's Day, one of the worst days ever - what a difference a year makes. Last year we were headed to Jamaica, that day he gave me a gold necklace with a single gold circle pendant on it. I stared at that necklace and saw it as a representation of my life - one thing - all alone. Totally singular. I anguished over that necklace all morning and finally said to him, “How could you give me something so awful - here you are ripping my life apart and you push that thought home by giving me a single solitary circle.” I cried and I yelled at him, and he looked shocked. The poor man had no idea why I had gone off the deep end. He said he was sorry that I didn’t like it and he would take it back. He left and was gone a very long time.

While he was gone I got to thinking that maybe I had gone a little overboard ranting at him that morning so I made his favourite yellow cake with butter cream icing. He came back home with two entwined hearts on a necklace and handed it to me with a bunch of flowers and then started to walk away.

I said, “Did they give you any problem exchanging it?” and all he said was, “No - they felt sorry for me.”

That's when my heart broke again, this time for him. The pain and the sadness just kept piling up, we were both hurting and had no way to reach out to each other. I just could not reconcile myself to the fact my husband wanted to become my wife. He couldn’t understand how I couldn’t understand him.

I couldn’t believe the feelings of sadness and the amount of pain I felt on a daily basis. We continued the dance and every day it felt like he was moving further and further away from me. I always hoped that the next day would be better - but that never happened. My life with Steve was all I wanted, and that was being taken away from me. I felt I would be sad forever and a day - if I lived that long.

We both decided that maybe a change of scenery might help, so on the second weekend of March we went for a shopping trip to Syracuse, New York. We found a lovely Holiday Inn Express near the Carousel Mall (now known as Destiny USA). I love shopping so I was in my element and feeling happier than I’d felt in months. It made Steve happy to see me happy and he took me to a Coach store and told me to pick out a purse. I was in shock because I had never had a purse that cost more than fifty dollars before. Now I had my first gorgeous amazing purse that cost more than any shoes I had ever owned.

I was beyond thrilled, and in turn wanted to make Steve happy, so I suggested that maybe if he was interested we could go and look at ladies clothing. That way we could find him something he could wear around the house. He loved that idea and that's the day we found tall jeans by Liz Claiborne at J.C. Penney's. He picked up four pairs and snuck them into the men’s change room. You have to know that Steve is six foot one inch with thin long legs and when he put on those women's jeans they hugged his butt and made his legs look amazing. I tried not to notice that he looked better in jeans than I did.

Back at home I made it my mission to push the androgynous card. I thought if I could help Steve look less masculine for his sake, and less feminine for my sake, we would both be happy. He could remain a male but not necessarily look like one. At this point I had living in denial down to an art form.

I thought perhaps he was just confused and only thought he would like to dress like a woman. We lived in a rural area which didn't help with clothing options so when my daughter and her partner were over for dinner (her partner who dressed very avant-garde/metrosexual), it was decided that the

two men would go on a shopping expedition to Toronto together. They both liked the idea and I didn't have to be involved with it, so the idea worked out well.

The reality was a lot different, when they returned from their day in Toronto. Steve had two men's shirts that were pink and orange and a story on how they had lingered over a two hour Indian lunch. My daughter's partner on the other hand came back with lots of fun things for himself - this was so not a good plan. Steve came back frustrated and angry, and that night we had a very strong worded discussion. The bottom line was that androgyny was not going to be an option; the only thing he wanted and needed was to become a woman.

I thought if I went along with Steve dressing as a woman just at home, maybe that would be good enough and satisfy this urge he had to be female. I thought it was a good compromise and we could all be happy. The key words here were "just at home."

On weekends we would usually go out for a drive to poke in antique shops or have a coffee and a chat, but that stopped when Steve wanted to go out in public on weekends as a woman. I didn't want to hurt his feelings so I just made up reasons not to go out. One Saturday he came downstairs dressed as Sophie and asked if I was ready to leave. I must have looked at him as if he had two heads because he just looked back at me and said, "What?"

I said, "I can't go out with you looking like that here - we live here." Steve got angry and accused me of being embarrassed to be seen out with him when he was Sophie - which was true. I did not go out with Sophie that day and Steve didn't talk to me for the rest of the day.

Seriously, how could I? How could I possibly go out when we might have run into people we knew and what explanation could I give as to why I was with Sheelagh. In my mind everyone would know it was Steve and I feared the stares and judgement. It was all too unreal, and I felt I was living in the Twilight Zone - the only problem being was I never woke up.

It was also around this time when Steve had restarted facial electrolysis. I say restarted because unknown to me he had electrolysis on his face in 1995/96 because even back then he wanted to be a woman. This was before we met and I had no idea. This procedure was now taking so much time and money it was affecting our lives. I kept thinking my life was too short for this nonsense. This constantly ran through my mind, each time immediately followed by the thought that Steve should do it if it made him happy. I would like to say we lived each day as it came and life fell into a nice rhythm, but it didn't. There were many dark days that I felt like killing myself to escape my misery, and days I felt like killing Steve for taking the life I knew away from me.

It was springtime and I remember walking around the house with Steve, looking at the birds in the lilac bushes. Seeing the daffodils and tulips starting to inch their way up out of the dirt and then we made it to where the clothesline was. This was a beautiful clothesline that he made for me out of two cedar trees from our property that he cut down and erected by himself. I took one look at it and I just started crying - he was ruining everything with his "want" to transition.

I was going to have to leave him and my home and lose my beautiful flowers and clothesline - all because of his selfishness. That day I absolutely felt my life was over. That evening when I was drying dishes I was so overcome with anger and remorse that I took the glasses in my hands and smashed them on the floor while yelling at Steve about how everything was over. I kept smashing more plates on the floor with sobs racking my body because my life had changed, everything I believed in and loved was changed forever - I couldn't stop any of it. I couldn't bargain, or plead, or threaten; the course of life had taken a sharp turn and I had no say in the matter at all.

Diagnosis

In late April, Steve was given a set of tests and writing assignments to do by his therapist which were to be completed and then evaluated by a clinical psychologist. Subsequently an evaluation with the psychologist lasted two and a half hours. After looking at the assignments and the interview, the

psychologist came back with a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, and a recommendation that Steve receive treatment for the condition. Gender dysphoria is a condition that affects people who identify with a gender different from the one they were assigned at birth. The current medical treatment for people diagnosed with gender dysphoria is to support them in physically modifying their bodies so that they better match their gender identities. This approach recognizes that they have a medical problem that is corrected through various forms of medical intervention.

Steve came home with the results and showed me he had proof; he had a genuine medical problem and wasn't just wanting to be a woman for the heck of it. I asked if I could read the report and even though he didn't really feel comfortable with me doing so, he let me read it.

I think at that point he was feeling very vulnerable and raw and didn't want me using anything in the report against him. After reading it I remember sitting there and thinking that was the nail in the coffin. I had reached the point where I had proof Steve was a woman trapped in a man's body. Proof from a licensed professional, now I really had to look within myself for the answer to what would make my life happy.

Would I be happier on my own without my partner of thirteen plus years, or happy with a wife instead of my husband. Never in a million years did I ever think I would be faced with this question, and at that moment I didn't have an answer.

Starting Hormones

Now Steve had a real diagnosis of a recognized medical condition from an expert in medicine. The diagnostic report included a recommendation for treatment using contra-hormone therapy, as well as any other needed therapies.

He took the report to his doctor to make a request for contra-hormone therapy (CHT). When he went to the appointment, he also took two medical articles that fully described how to administer and monitor hormones .

“Do you want to see a psychiatrist?” was the first thing his doctor said to him. Steve pointed out to him that he didn’t need to see a psychiatrist since he had already spent several months in therapy and had been diagnosed with gender dysphoria. All that was needed was to prescribe the medication that was standard for the condition.

“I don’t feel qualified to treat you for this,” the doctor countered.

“But here are all the instructions you need to help me!” Steve replied.

“If you’d like me to refer you to someone, I will,” the doctor offered.

The doctor seemed to have no idea of who he could refer Steve to. Basically his family doctor had refused to prescribe CHT and seemed willing to leave his patient without any treatment at all. Steve knew he needed the treatment to continue on his journey to becoming a woman in hopes of getting beyond the darkness and gloom he spent so many years living under. If the doctor wouldn't help him, then he would help himself.

He found the medication he needed on an online pharmacy. He ordered the drugs and a few weeks later started regularly receiving packages from Asia. I asked him what they were and he told me one was a female hormone called estradiol and the other was a testosterone blocker called spironolactone.

I could not believe that Steve would order drugs from a foreign country and then put them in his body without even thinking twice. Seriously - drugs from Asia ordered online! They were totally legal, but who knew what was really in them or if they were safe. The man was driving me crazy!

He explained they were made by a reputable North American company, but they were just coming from Asia because he couldn't find any doctor willing to prescribe CHT in Ontario. My concern and love for Steve overrode all my other feelings and I begged him to stop self-medicating. He said he couldn't - this was the path he had to take in order to be healed. For now that meant he was becoming the Sophia Grace that I didn’t ask for.

An Important Decision

I knew I had to talk to someone or I was going to explode. I just couldn’t deal with this all by myself any longer so when Steve went to work I called my sister, who I called Sissy. I just put everything out there and between sobs I said, “What do I do?”

I remember her taking a deep breath and asking me what did I want to do. Not really helpful, but all I wanted was my life back. I wanted to be normal and live a normal life, but at that point we all knew that wasn't going to happen.

In my mind I kept thinking I was married to a crossdresser which refers to a person who wears clothing and accessories commonly associated with the opposite sex. The hard truth was that I was married to a transsexual, a person whose sex related structures of the brain that define gender identity are exactly opposite to the physical sex organs of their body. I was on a steep learning curve because when I first heard of the word transsexual, all I thought of was the Rocky Horror Picture Show, but I quickly learned how wrong I was. Steve was not someone who wanted to wear women's clothes for fun, but a woman who was trapped in a man's body.

After all was said and done it came down to one question - would I love Steve no matter what or who he became. It took some soul searching but in the end the answer was relatively easy, and the answer was yes. My love for this person could survive because I believed in him and loved him from the very core of my soul. It was a decision I made knowing he couldn’t change the way he was, but I could change the way I thought.

Trying to Understand

One afternoon I sat down with Steve to discuss the whole phenomenon that was changing our lives, and recorded his answers.
We started with two roads - the red road that meanders and goes over hills and is hard to maneuver and the black road that was straight and level.

ME: It looks like you chose the red road instead of the black road.

STEVE: It looks like I chose the red road but when I was on the black road I would either get bummed out or something would happen that would throw me back onto the red road.

ME: But you didn't really have a choice to choose the red or black road because you are who you are.

STEVE: I guess I am who I am but I don't know how far back I was who I was.

ME: What does that mean?

STEVE: Maybe some people have lives that go along without too many events happening so that they become a lot older before they are faced with the situation of questioning something about the way their life is explained to them by the world, and what they discover on their own.

ME: But your life didn't explain to you that you were a transsexual - you always knew you were different.

STEVE: I always knew I was different but there weren't always words for it although I think I went right off the black road when I had a conflict with Christianity and having that spiritual experience when I was twelve or thirteen. I guess there is no explanation for that - I read my way from front to back of the bible and I was a bit stuck on Christianity up until that point and I thought there were answers to everything in it - but for the kind of event I experienced there wasn't any answer. So that had me questioning things not just about church or people in a church, but that particular event, that particular experience and other events happening around that time that related to it.

ME: Moving forward, you reached a point when you had electrolysis in the late nineties.

STEVE: Yes, 96 or 97.

ME: Then you quit that because you were tossed back or chose to go back to the black road.

STEVE: Yes - but it was 1997 when my first marriage ended. By the time I went to work for eight hours and came home and looked after the house chores, and attended a night class, there wasn't very much time left in the day. I still hadn't given up - I still had that thread of that view of how I could live my life as a woman and that was still happening right up until the time we got together. You asked some questions and I tried to explain it and it was a big problem for you which meant it was a big problem for us and I needed to keep you around because I loved you so much. Although, I'd been on that path for quite awhile I also knew there were a lot of conflicting opinions about it. There were people at that time who said it's the way you were born and you can't get rid of it, and unless you do something about it you're going to suffer. There were other people who said, we don't know the real cause of it and no one can pin it down to just one particular thing so it could be an aberration or it could be a matter of self discipline.

ME: So when you met me you were already in the transmode?

STEVE: I was already in the transmode, transgender, although I don't think that word was around too much.

ME: But when I met you, you weren't dressed as a woman.

STEVE: Not particularly but you also forgot that when you introduced me to your sister I was wearing eyeliner.

ME: I don't remember that.

STEVE: I didn't remember it either until she mentioned it. So that was after we were living together in Lakefield.

ME: But you stopped all that and put it aside because of your love for me.

STEVE: That's right.

ME: So that was back in 1998, so what changed by 2011 that you said I can't do this charade anymore - I'm done.

STEVE: That was a conclusion that was drawn over a period of self-reflection. The day I injured my back was the day I started back on antidepressants. I had gone to see my doctor and he said I looked sad and I said I was and he asked me if I was always like this and I said I was. He asked me if I'd been on antidepressants before and I said I had, and he thought I should begin taking them again. I asked how long I would have to be on them and he said if you've been on antidepressants at least twice before, then the current thinking is that you have to be on them for the rest of your life because after you've had two major depressive episodes it's like there's a track burned into your brain that can never be removed again. So I left and picked up the prescription and I was feeling pretty bad about that and I had no inclination to be self-destructive but when I went to pick up the mail from the box, the motorcycle bucked and went forward. I had to grab it so it wouldn't go off the side of the road and smash itself. I had one hand in the mailbox and one hand on the handlebars and apparently when you have a thousand pound motorcycle with a 100 horsepower motor do that it causes quite a bit of damage to your back so at that point I knew there was something wrong - it felt quite wrong but it didn't feel like it was broken. It was a day later that my back tightened up so badly that I couldn't move and couldn't go into work.

ME: I remember that - what year was that?

STEVE: That was in June 2010. So there I was - I had incurable depression and medication that I had to take for the rest of my life. I had not been feeling good for at least a couple of years and I figured this is stupid, this is really stupid - why am I living like this. I have a nice house, I have a nice wife, I have dogs who love me, and I’m not poor - what's wrong with me. So I made up my mind within that month of June since I was totally incapacitated, that I was going to discover what it was that made my life feel like a burden instead of a joy.

ME: So in this time that you had off what was the defining moment - how did you know that you weren't supposed to be Steve?

STEVE: I think it's very hard to pinpoint an exact moment. One thing I do remember was when I was studying that mantra course and there was a particular mantra of Lakshmi in there that provoked feminine energy. I remembered repeating that mantra and the energy I was feeling was extremely familiar and I felt very aligned at that point. There were some other things that came up from doing EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique) as I was unburdening myself of a lot of the superficial things, I was remembering attempts at transition, or whatever it had been called years before, and I remember questioning myself as to why I wasn't happy. The first answer that always came up was - you're not living the right life. You're not supposed to be a man in this world, but automatically, without hesitation I would shut that down. Now things were coming up to the surface - this was something I knew about myself - back when I was kind of experimenting with being a woman I was happier, life wasn't easier, but I just felt better. It were those memories, that refreshed my memory that that had to be a part of my life whether I wanted it to be or not.

ME: So when you first met me you put all that aside and lived your life with me as Steve, so what was the difference between now and before?

STEVE: Because I believed in 1998 I could put it all behind me but by 2010 I had twelve years of recognizing that was something I really couldn't do. It had been knocking me down for years and years and it would not go away, no matter how much I wanted it to go away, no matter how much I prayed it would go away, no matter how much I saw it causing far more agony and pain than I wanted, I could not stop it, I could not stop it.

ME: So either you wanted to kill yourself or you had to take that path.

STEVE: Exactly, unfortunately neither way would leave things intact as they were. It was do or die.

ME: So when you told me, were you hoping I wouldn't leave or did you know I wouldn't leave because I loved you.

STEVE: I wasn't even planning to tell you, I can't even say that I had a plan of approach. I just started doing stuff. I didn't have a plan or a preconception in my mind of what would happen. I just started taking estrogen to feel more womanly. I had no plan of telling you or anybody else.

ME: But you did.

STEVE: Well, you asked the questions and those questions led to the revelation as to what was happening in my mind with regards to that.

ME: So you told me and I freaked out and what made you realize that being a crossdresser (a woman at home and a man out in the world) wouldn't be good enough for you.

STEVE: I knew it would never work for me because it had never worked before. Crossdressers, based on what I knew, got thrills from wearing women's clothes, but that's not me. For me the women's clothes come along with the women's world, for crossdressers maybe the women's world, comes along with the women's clothes. My situation is I was a female spirit living in a world that treated me as male, so there's not a whole lot of joy in that kind of thing.

There is no more joy for a woman living as a woman than there is for a man living as a man. Both genders have their own joys and challenges. But when a person is one way inside themselves but appears very differently on the outside, there is a huge distress in trying to deal with a world that unknowingly treats them wrongly every day. So there is great relief to them when they can live as they actually are supposed to.

I feel like I have escaped from prison, and it really feels good to be living a life where I feel I can be me. I go through a day now enjoying it instead of pretending to be a male. I no longer have to live the life I'm not in order to avoid the fear. It's nice to live a life without fear.

ME: Fear of what?

STEVE: Fear of being ridiculed, the fear of rejection, fear of loss, it was keeping me locked in and keeping me away from living the life that fate had selected for me.

ME: So it came down to you having to save yourself at the expense of your marriage and your job, basically everything.

STEVE: That's right because when the alternative is death, no matter how much you don't want to upset the rest of your world and hurt the people close to you, there really isn't an alternative. If I chose living as the woman I am, then I could have lost my loved one. If I chose death I would certainly have lost you. By becoming myself, at least there was a small chance that we could stay together.
As far as work went - I could live or die one way or another with that. But it was you that I was really concerned about hurting or losing, and that's why I couldn't talk to you about it before. In the past years, when the topic came up in any conversation, you were vehemently opposed to talking about it, or anything to do with it. I really didn't expect a good outcome by being more open with you about this.

ME: I'm still here.

STEVE: Awesome - miracles do happen.

V Sees a Therapist

I needed to talk to a therapist of my own, so through Steve's work I was referred to a male therapist in our hometown. The hour I spent with him was one of the most demoralizing and depressing hours of my life. He seemed amused at first, and when he picked up on my strong dislike of transgenderism (after I had explained that term to him) his prejudice began to show. I was looking for some direction or support and he actually said:

"Those people should stay in San Francisco."

That did it for me - he just lumped everyone who was not heterosexual together and thought they should go off and live somewhere else. I couldn't get out of there fast enough, and when he wanted to know when I'd like my next appointment I told him I'd get back to him. I never did.

When I got home I just cried on Steve's shoulder. He was extremely supportive. He said we'd find someone else who knew what they were talking about. I thought that was going to be a very hard person to find, but less than a month later I was able to meet up with a female therapist who had a background dealing with transgendered individuals. She actually was able to help me get a handle on things and feel grounded.

One of the things she said was that if I didn't want to leave the relationship I should have some type of input into it. This made sense and the biggest thing I hated at that moment was the name Sophia Grace. I went home to Steve and said that I really hated that name and could we please pick a name we both liked together. He seemed shocked that I wanted to have a say in his name but after I explained how the therapist put it, Steve understood.

The next Saturday over barbecued hamburgers and wine we bantered around a few names. Steve's two final picks were Stevie and Sophie and mine were Shayla and Sheelagh. After a while Steve decided on the name Sheelagh spelt not Sheila, but Sheelagh, so as to look unique and different. She picked Tara as her middle name which I was happy with. It was a good way to compromise all the way around. Therefore as of July 2011, when dressed as a woman, she was now known as Sheelagh.

So now, some people would be wondering why the hell did you stay with Steve? Where was your self-respect? Where's what you want? It took a lot of introspection, visits with my therapist, talks with my sister, and spending time on my own. Was this relationship really one I wanted to continue in? Could I be happy? Even with all the changes and upheaval this caused, when it came right down to it - when I looked into Sheelagh's eyes - I was still looking into the eyes and soul of the person I married who I still loved more than anything.

We were married in 1999 and had a history and a love together I had never shared with anyone else. When it came right down to it, if Steve had developed cancer or some other debilitating disease - would I have left? The answer was always a no.

I am not a fool with my head in the sand. I now knew gender dysphoria was not a disease, it is something you are born with. Unfortunately the end product was still the same; a huge physical transformation of the one I loved. One very interesting thing I learned was that I also had to go through a transformation of my own.

SO? What?

One evening I was really at loose ends and feeling very alone and isolated. In the evenings Steve spent most of his time on the computer researching information, and spending time on transgendered sites corresponding with other people experiencing the same things. I mentioned to him that it was good that there were other people for him to be in contact with, but what about the partners or wives of the people who were transgendered. Why wasn't there a support group for us. That's when he told me that there was a chat room on one of the transgender websites for SO's. I had to ask what the heck was an SO, and found out it meant Significant Other. I must admit I wasn't thrilled going from wife to SO, it felt demeaning, but In thought I'd log in and give it a try.

It was one of the best things I ever did, I met other women whose husbands or partners were transgendered. In that chat room there was a lot of disbelief, anger, and resentment; especially from people who had just found out about the change that was going to affect them forever. The women who were the most helpful to me were the people who had been dealing with the transition longer and who had made peace with it and their partners. Some of them had ended up divorcing while a few others were still together .

It was here I could express my doubts and concerns and get good logical answers from people who had crossed the bridge before me. To this day I

am still in contact with two of the women I met, and I doubt they will ever really truly understand how they saved my sanity when I thought I'd lost it forever.

Last Arizona with My Husband

In September I remember feeling very sad and depressed because this would be the last time I would be traveling with my husband. We were going on what had become our yearly trip to Sedona, Arizona.
The last time Steve and I would fit in within the heterosexual world in which we live. I was past being angry, I just felt sad for what I was losing.

The trip went well but it also contained a surprise - while we were there Steve went and saw a doctor in Phoenix who dealt with transsexuals. He had contacted the doctor before we left for the trip and made arrangements for this visit. I wasn't happy having to lose a day traveling to Phoenix for this, but it was important to Steve, so I couldn't stand in the way. Fortunately, I was able to spend a few hours at one of the shopping malls in north Phoenix while he saw the doctor.

Steve was thrilled because this doctor provided the first "legal" prescription for contra-hormone therapy. We went right to Walgreens and got everything filled. He was so happy, while part of me just felt dead inside. I felt so divided because I knew this was a path he had to take to keep his sanity but some days I felt like I was losing mine.

The rest of our time together in Sedona went surprisingly well. We went hiking around Bell Rock and through the Sonoran Desert. We had lovely dinners out, and many soul baring discussions sitting on the balcony in the dark, drinking wine and listening to the coyotes off in the distance. I think in talking together we became more understanding of each other's positions with regards to the transition, this in turn led to an afternoon of wild passionate love making.

Even though the trip itself was great, when it was over and we were leaving through the Phoenix Airport, different thoughts kept going through my mind. I was thinking; this was the last time we'd eat there together, and it

would be the last time we'd pass through security together, it was the last time we would be us. The tears were very close to the surface.

Name Change

Before leaving for Arizona Sheelagh initiated the name change on her birth certificate. In November 2011, she received her name change certificate and a new birth certificate. The gender marker was still marked as male because GRS had to be proven in order for the gender to be changed.

She had already had her driver's license gender marker switched to female. She was able to do that with a note from her doctor that said it was appropriate to have the gender marker changed, so therefore the government could change it on her license.

Wait times for specialists in Canada take a long time, and it was in November that Sheelagh finally got to see an endocrinologist who took over from where the Phoenix doctor left off. I was happy Sheelagh was in good hands but I vacillated between being happy for her and sad for me.

By the time December 2011 rolled around Sheelagh had updated her name on all accounts, the property deed, and the will. I have to hand it to her - it wasn't easy to go in there and change everything from Steve to Sheelagh. She was so motivated and so pleased with finally getting to live a real life as a woman, she sucked it up and spent many long hours writing emails, letters, filling out forms and waiting on hold for customer service agents.

I have absolutely no recall of Christmas that year. It was a quiet affair and one that has disappeared within the recesses of my mind. By the end of the year 2011 while I was still coming to grips with the reality of being married to a woman instead of a man, Sheelagh was busy setting up her future life as Sheelagh Tara May. The following is a taped interview we did with regards to her being seen as a woman within our society.

ME: When did your name change on your birth certificate come through?

SHEELAGH: The name change on the certificate came through in November 2011 and that made it possible to change the name on my driver's license. I changed that first since it's the primary source of identification. I went to Service Ontario and had to fill out a form for that and at the same time I decided to get the name on my social insurance number updated as well.

ME: Was it easy to do?

SHEELAGH: With the driver's license I had to stand in line for about twenty minutes while other people came and went. The staff had never had anyone come in to change their gender marker before. The counter person had to find the big book of rules and then had to run it by her boss. When they finally came down to discovering their special rule, they said “yes we can do that.” They took a new picture of me and two weeks later I received the new driver’s license with the female gender marker shown on it.

ME: That must have made you feel good.

SHEELAGH: Yes it did. I felt a bit triumphant and affirmed.
I had to go to a different counter for the social insurance number change. There they basically just took all the information, typed it in and gave me a new card.

ME: That was it?

SHEELAGH: That was it - they didn't ask me a single question. It was very easy, so on two government records I felt that I became a woman that day.

ME: What about your health card?

SHEELAGH: I took a form into Service Canada and they sent me a new card. The passport I changed in Whitby, and it went very smoothly. The credit cards were easy to change because no gender or picture were shown on the cards.

ME: When you were changing these cards did you ever think they were looking at you funny or judging you?

SHEELAGH: I was going to do it so it made no difference what faces they made or reactions they had. I did have butterflies in my stomach with everyone I talked to. The first bank I changed my accounts with was the Royal Bank and they were pretty good. I went to the one in Bowmanville and filled in many forms, I felt awkward but I was treated with respect. The TD bank was great to deal with as well. On the phone I had a little difficulty because some of the places I called to change my name insisted on calling me Sir, but when they typed in the new name and clicked the button, they began calling me Ma'am - because in their mind until that button was pushed they were still talking to a man because the computer told them they were.

ME: Were you feeling more anxiety having to deal with all the legalities, or more freedom because you were getting closer to being the real you?

SHEELAGH: It was definitely the freedom, because that happiness was carrying me forward and energizing me while I went through the huge list of everything that had to be changed, because there were probably about sixty places where my name had to be changed. I thought there were only ten or fifteen. I made a spreadsheet and wrote down all the places and it was a bit harrowing. It took most of November 2011 to get to the point where all the notifications had been given.

ME: How did you learn how to dress like a woman?

SHEELAGH: That was something I knew by my twenties so I probably picked that up in my early teens from magazines, catalogs and television. It was a matter of imitating and experimenting.

ME: So you learned how to do make up just by looking at pictures?

SHEELAGH: Yeah, that and experimenting with makeup.

ME: How did you learn how to behave as a woman in this society?

SHEELAGH: That's probably a matter of imitation as well. I spent a lot more time with women when I was small, and a lot of it was observing women without judgment and just absorbing it and running it through my mind. It was also a matter of recognizing that I had a womanliness within myself, so a big part of that behaviour thing wasn't so much layering something on, as much as letting the masculine part go. It was a process of dismantling the outer shell and behaving like a woman which quickly became natural.

ME: So once the male body armour was gone, what fears if any do you have now as a woman that you didn't have as a man?

SHEELAGH: I still feel pretty confident. In a way there's an exclusion where there's mostly males - like in the workplace - I'm never going to be one of the boys. I thought about it and I realized I never have been. Other males saw me as Steve, as one of them, but I was not seeing myself as one of them. I didn't relate to them. Their culture had always been foreign to me and my inclusion in it depended upon me acting a part, so I could be included as one of them. Now I don't have to put on a mask to be part of that group which I never actually felt I was a part of. I have more freedom now.

CHAPTER TWO
2012

New Year's Eve

New Year's Eve 2012 was a quiet time for us. We usually liked to stay at home and have some wine and snacks and watch the ball drop in Times Square. It had become a tradition for us and to me it was nice to have that consistency. With a great deal of love and support from Sheelagh and support from my family and friends I was feeling pretty contented. I had resigned myself to the fact that the love I felt for Sheelagh superseded everything else that was happening. If Sheelagh needed to be, then I was going to be there and be supportive.

To be honest I really did consider leaving once or twice, but when I asked myself - do I really want to live a life without this person in it, my answer was again a no. Our minds and hearts were entwined and I wanted to make our marriage work. I knew none of this was happening "just to bother me" or " just because Sheelagh felt like it was a choice, and she wanted to live her life as a woman." No, I knew that Sheelagh could no longer live a lie.

Over the last few years living as Steve, he no longer laughed and he drank more than usual. I guess it helped to dull the pain. I had come to realize the truth, it wasn't a choice to be a transwoman, it was a necessity. Gender dysphoria does that to people and that was what Sheelagh had been diagnosed with. I couldn't quite picture my life with Sheelagh but I knew I couldn't picture it without her. So on that New Year's Eve we toasted to new beginnings and new adventures together .

Facial Feminization Surgery

Getting Ready

The month of January contained the last weeks Sheelagh had to get through as Steve at work. On January 28th, she was going to go through Facial Feminization Surgery (FFS), and then take off several weeks to heal, and then return to work at the end of February as Sheelagh.

I felt a lot of trepidation around this surgery, it was going to take approximately seven hours and was major surgery. Facial Feminization Surgery (FFS), is an operation some people get to make their features appear more feminine. In Sheelagh's case she was going to undergo an endoscopic brow lift with scalp advancement and temporal fat grafting. That means that the entire orbital rim and frontal bone is aggressively contoured down to show naturally feminine proportions. She was also having a lower eyelid blepharoplasty, a feminizing rhinoplasty, cheek implants, a full face, neck and jaw skin lift, chin bone burring, a tracheal camouflage, a jaw angle bone reduction and a vertical lip lift. No wonder it was going to take seven hours!

As the month went on I became more nervous and anxious about it, and Sheelagh became more excited and expectant. Sheelagh made all of the plans; such as booking the flights to and from Chicago and the hotel as well as the transportation to and from the airport. I really wasn't looking forward to any of this so I did not try and help expedite the way things were playing out.

I was nervous for Sheelagh getting through security at the Toronto airport. She had on her wig and did the best she could with makeup and as luck would have it we were waved to the side and had security wave a wand over us, and then we were through. No body scan machine or pat downs - that was a huge relief for us both. That was the first time we were flying together as women and it felt weird - not wrong - just different. At that point I still wasn't used to her coming and using the same washroom as me.

Arrival

The trip was uneventful and we were met in Chicago by a car service that worked with the doctor who was going to be doing Sheelagh's surgery. They took us to our hotel and I checked us in. It was with huge sighs of relief when we made it to our suite. We had arrived!

After settling in we headed out for dinner. We had a lovely time and stayed away from talking about the operation that was looming around the corner. We eventually returned to our hotel and started organizing things since we were going to be staying there for the next ten days. It was set up with a kitchenette so I could prepare food for Sheelagh, as well as a separate bedroom so she could rest quietly if I wanted to watch television.

I remember lying in bed that night feeling sad because the face I had loved for thirteen years was going to be irretrievably altered forever. I kept my feelings to myself because I knew Sheelagh was excited about the new changes, but also a bit frightened about the surgery, and I didn't want to add to her uneasiness.

Surgery

At 5:30 A.M., on January 28, 2012, Doctor K arrived in his big white truck to pick Sheelagh up. He owned his own clinic and operating room so he offered to get her on his way in to work. I felt like my world was taken away when Sheelagh walked out the door. There were no words to describe how utterly sad and alone I felt. I went back up to our room and had myself a good cry. I had made my choice and I was staying married to Sheelagh, but the reality of it sometimes could sneak up and overpower me. My mind was still trying to scramble to keep up with my heart.

Since the surgery was going to be seven hours in length, I was told there was no reason for me to be at the clinic. After I had some breakfast I took the shuttle over to the mall and spent most of the day there looking around. Throughout that time I received three updates on Sheelagh's condition from the doctor's office. Everything was going well and she was stable. After

4:00 P.M. I received a call saying Sheelagh was in recovery, my first thought was, “ Thank god she made it.”

The PA (personal assistant) who would be staying with us for the first twenty four hours after surgery, said she would be driving Sheelagh back shortly. In my world that meant around 6:00 P.M., but it wasn’t until nearly 8:00 P.M. that they pulled up to the front of the hotel. The personal assistant (PA) got a wheelchair out of the back of the car and helped Sheelagh into it. I was horrified by how bad Sheelagh looked; her whole head was encased in bandages that looked like a helmet. Her eyes were just slits due to all the bruising and she couldn’t speak due to the bandages, but when she saw me she took my hand and wrote "I love you" on my palm with her finger. It was definitely a beautiful moment in time that made my heart melt.

The PA and I took Sheelagh up to the suite and the PA got her into bed. Sheelagh had a terrible headache but had to wait another hour before she could be given some painkillers and diazepam to help her feel relaxed. Over the next hour Sheelagh became very agitated and very unhappy because she said she felt like she was choking and couldn’t swallow properly. It was a very bad night - the PA loosened the helmet a little but that didn’t really help - finally she said she could go back to the clinic and get a breathing tube if we wanted her to. Poor Sheelagh had stuffing up her nose and could barely open her mouth and really thought she was going to die. We told the PA we wanted the tube so she left to go get it.

Sheelagh asked me for her purse which I found for her, and she took out her health insurance card and threw it at me. She said I’d need to call that number after she died, because she truly felt her throat was closing up due to the bandaging, and she couldn’t breathe because her nose was blocked because of the rhinoplasty that had been done. The only way she could breathe was through her mouth, and that wasn’t working so well. She started pulling at the bottom of the green head casing and I had to hold her hands down to get her to stop.

She began to cry and she was crying red tears. Red tears! I had never, ever seen anyone cry red tears in my life, it was terrifying. By that time I was crying and feeling exhausted, finally the PA returned. She gave Sheelagh

her medications and inserted the breathing tube that allowed Sheelagh to breathe more freely. The PA also took the packing out of Sheelagh's nose (two days early), and put some cuts into the head casing to make it a little looser. That did the trick because after that Sheelagh fell asleep. With the fear of dying gone, she could finally rest. I ended up sleeping on the love seat in the living room and the PA stayed in the bedroom with Sheelagh.

I awoke at 3:00 A.M. and peeked in on them. They were both sleeping so I went back and managed to fall asleep. It was a harrowing and traumatic evening for everyone. We made it through to the morning and the PA did the morning cleaning with Sheelagh and had me watch so I would know what to do. Sheelagh had a tube inserted just below her right ear and it drained blood out through the tube into what I called a blood bulb. This bulb would fill up with blood and needed to be emptied twice a day – once in the morning and once before going to bed. The procedure for this was stomach churning. After that was finished, Sheelagh had to have her eyes cleaned and three different drops put in. Since she couldn't close her eyes all the way due to the swelling, her eyes would dry out without the special drops. My work was cut out for me.

With the Diazepam and pain killers Sheelagh was feeling better and slept a lot easier. When it came to meal time she had a Mylanta cocktail for starters, and vanilla pudding for all three meals. The PA left that night at 6:00 P.M. because her twenty four hour shift was over. Now I really was on my own. At 6:30 P.M. Sheelagh got up and I fed her and we went through the whole cleaning list the PA had left for me. The entire procedure took one hour. It was exhausting for Sheelagh, and for me as well. I got her tucked back into bed around 8:30 P.M. and then when Sissy called I couldn't control myself. I just broke down in tears – I felt totally overwhelmed, queasy and isolated. She was a sympathetic ear and a calming presence which helped to ground me.

After talking for an hour I felt better and ended up watching some television. I must have fallen asleep sitting up, because the next thing I knew Sheelagh was walking down the hallway ringing her little bell (you know the bell I gave to her and told her to ring for me if she needed anything, never give a sick person a bell). I cleaned her eyes and nose and

gave her some medication and she was back in bed by 11:30 P.M. I hit the bed (a real bed!) by midnight and fell sound asleep.

Monday January 30th, was a very early morning. Sheelagh woke up at 3:30, 4:30 and 5:40 A.M. wanting a cold eye gauze cover and Vaseline for her lips. By 7:00 A.M. we started the morning clean up routine, and she had a breakfast of vanilla pudding and Enfalac.

By 9:00 A.M. she was propped up in bed listening to her audio books but promptly fell asleep. She got some rest while I ran downstairs to get myself some breakfast. The next two days we followed the same routine, but Sheelagh progressed to being able to eat scrambled eggs and even a yogurt. The doctor dropped in and said everything looked great and Sheelagh was doing extremely well. That made me feel reassured because Sheelagh sure didn't look well to me!

The next day the PA arrived and took off Sheelagh's head casing and washed out her hair. This was a very long arduous process, followed by a sit down shower, now by this time Sheelagh was tired but the hard part hadn't even begun. The PA showed me what the next step was going to be and it was a deep tissue massage on the face and neck. You actually massage along the scar line and you can hear things under the skin pop and feel bubbles move, it's very disconcerting.

When the PA did it the first time I cried and had to leave the room because I couldn't stand seeing Sheelagh in so much pain. When I had to give it a try, it felt absolutely awful. I felt horrible. You know you have to do the massage to get the desired effect, but you don't want to hurt the person you love. When that was finally finished the PA put a lighter head halter on Sheelagh, and then finally left. Sheelagh had been up from 1:00 until 7:00 P.M. She was exhausted and I was so glad to see that day end.

We made it to February 1st and by then I had learned to master the blood bulb and had managed to get the cleanup whittled down to forty-five minutes. Even the deep tissue massage wasn't freaking me out as much as it did in the beginning. It was a lot to deal with. I was everything from PA to housekeeper to chef. You haven't lived until you've taken a hotel trolley

cart full of grocery bags (without losing any) into an elevator and up to your room. This whole adventure was emotionally and physically draining. The payback was in seeing Sheelagh getting a little stronger and a little happier day by day. For the first time in five days Sheelagh was able to leave our room and slowly walked down to the lobby area and had a cup of tea. This was a huge accomplishment!

On February 2nd, Sheelagh woke me up at 6:00 A.M. because she wanted to go downstairs for breakfast because she was hungry – unbelievable. Six days before she could barely open her mouth and now she was munching on an omelet, sausages, home fries, a muffin and tea. She was definitely on the mend and it did my heart good to see her up and about even though she still looked like she'd been hit by a truck. After I cleaned the sutures and massaged them, she slept for nearly six hours.

At 6:00 P.M. her doctor dropped in and said she could get the blood tube taken out on Saturday and the nose splint would be able to come off as well. Very exciting – especially getting rid of that blood bulb! At 3:00 P.M. the next day we went to the clinic and the blood tube was removed as well as all the face tape – that made Sheelagh very happy! All the excitement and traveling caused Sheelagh a lot of pain. When we arrived back at our hotel two hours later, she took her pain medication and fell fast asleep. Unfortunately, I had to wake her up to give her more medication and do the massage but she went right back to sleep after that.

On day eight she seemed to hit a wall – the pain was intense and she felt miserable and tired. The doctor said that after the first week the patient seems to feel more pain and experience some depression, the body just needed to rest and heal. All Sheelagh was supposed to do was rest, relax, and keep the pain away. It was reassuring to know that her body was doing what it was supposed to do.

On Monday, February 6th, Sheelagh was showering herself as well as dressing herself. I was still doing that deep tissue massage and feeding her, but the pressure to be all things to her had lessened. I was able to relax a little bit. Sheelagh's face and neck were still bruised and swollen and she

still tired extremely easily, but she was up for a visit from a transwoman she had met online who lived in the area.

This woman arrived at 9:30 A.M. and the two of them visited in the breakfast room for a couple of hours. It was interesting to me to meet a transwoman who wasn't having FFS and to hear how her coming out to her wife ended in divorce and coming out at work ended in her being fired. Such a very sad and different outcome compared to Sheelagh. It made my heart break to hear she was banned from seeing her children because she had been told she would confuse and upset them. She wasn't sad, but she wasn't terribly happy either. She was resigned to the fact that that part of her life was over. When Sheelagh's friend left it was like someone had popped her balloon, she just deflated. After a small lunch and some pain medication she was off to sleep.

My friends and family were quite often mentioning how brave and courageous I was, but that's not how I felt. Most of the time I felt scared and apprehensive, and hoped that the love the two of us shared would be enough to whether all the changes taking place.

The next couple of days went by with a feeding, cleaning and massaging routine in place. When Sheelagh rested I went out to the Jewel-Osco supermarket and bought groceries and had her prescription for Vicodin filled. Finally we made it to February 9th, and Sheelagh was going to the clinic to get the staples taken out of the incision in her forehead. It sounded worse than it was and the best part (and the scariest for me) was that we were leaving for home the next day.

Antonio

I had to use the hotel's shuttle for everything from grocery shopping to picking up prescriptions. I saw the same people there day after day and I became friends with a few of them. One of the young fellows who drove the shuttle was quite nice. He was twenty one years old and told me all about his family and his want to go to school. Unfortunately he had to work to bring money in because his father was gone and his mother was sick. One day he actually said to me, "I hope you don't mind my saying this but

we've had women here for girls nights out and things, but they never looked at each other like you and Sheelagh do."

I said, "Maybe that's because they were friends but Sheelagh and I are married."

He thought about that for a moment and then told me he didn't believe in homosexuality because he was a good Christian. He also asked me if I was afraid I wouldn't get into heaven when I died. The whole conversation seemed a little surreal so I just said that my god is a loving and forgiving god and I don't have any worries. He then smiled at me and said that I was a very nice person with a kind heart, even if I was gay.

Returning Home

At the end of our two week stay there, Antonio made a point of coming to say goodbye to us both, and to wish Sheelagh a quick recovery. To this day I think of him and wonder if maybe he is able to see gay people not as an abomination against his religion, but as people who can be kind with good hearts.

Having been with Sheelagh for so many years before she began transitioning, I was used to being looked after by a man and helped through airports. This time I was the one in charge. I didn't sleep well the night before imagining all the terrible things that could go wrong; like getting lost, Sheelagh fainting, dealing with all the stares of strangers wondering who had beaten up the poor woman. I even believed that if she got on that plane she would have an embolism. When morning came I think I was the one who could have used the Lorazepam!

The car service picked us up and took us to O'Hare airport. I had called ahead and we were met by an airport employee with a wheelchair - that was a huge relief - now if Sheelagh fainted she wouldn't hurt herself. I kept Sheelagh hydrated and medicated because this trip was extremely hard on her. She made it through the flight mostly by sleeping and she didn't even die of an embolism – things went well.

We landed in Toronto and we were met at the gate by another employee with a wheelchair. That was the only time we breezed through customs, who knew that people in wheelchairs didn't have to wait in line! The baggage claim was the worst experience because I had to lift two heavy suitcases off of the luggage carousel – luckily a kind man showed up and helped me lift the second one. Once all the luggage was corralled, the employee took us right outside, hailed a taxi and helped Sheelagh into it. This was absolutely wonderful because by this time I was feeling totally overwhelmed.

We took the taxi to the hotel where we had left our car. I loaded Sheelagh and the luggage inside and now I got to drive us home. This was another thing I never had to do before, so more pressure to get through Toronto's rush hour and get home without hitting anything or falling asleep. A trip that would normally take one hour took nearly two hours, but we made it home safely. By the time I got Sheelagh inside and settled in bed and all the luggage in, I felt like I'd just finished running a marathon. Thank heavens that was over and we were home. I was so exhausted I think I fell asleep sitting up on the couch… again.

Home Recovery

Sheelagh was so happy to be home, back where we belonged. She did not return to work until the beginning of March. The month of February was spent healing and waiting for the swelling to go down. Her pain was being handled well with the pain killers she was taking until she reached the three week mark. That was when the nerves started to reconnect in her forehead; she went from feeling just uncomfortable to experiencing real pain.

We still had a nightly routine of massaging her face and neck. The hardest part was the nose squeezing which hurt the worst. We did nose squeezing because there's the incision below the nose and the broken bones within the nose and if massaging was not done she would end up with a big bulbous nose. Massaging pushes the extra moisture under the skin and helps it to drain into the lymphatic system and drain away, otherwise it accumulates in that tissue and a person would become disfigured.

Emotionally Sheelagh was feeling grounded and pretty good because she had survived the surgery. I was happy she had survived but wasn't thrilled with all the constant massaging which took nearly an hour every night and made my fingers ache.

Sheelagh Back to Work

It was in August of 2011 that Sheelagh spoke to human resources at her place of work about transitioning on the job. The woman she spoke with was very professional and helpful, she said she would deal with it and talk to Sheelagh's district manager about the transition. Sheelagh was extremely lucky to be working in a place that was supportive of the transition.

Sheelagh was going to go back to work for the very first time ever as a woman. Her company had brought in a transgender education consultant to do a seminar on transsexuals while Sheelagh was away from work getting FFS.

We had the following taped conversation about her return to work.

ME: Why did you have FFS? (Facial feminization surgery)

SHEELAGH: Well, I was such a darn gorgeous guy but a darn gorgeous guy doesn't necessarily make a good looking woman. I needed some surgical tune ups to my face so that people wouldn't get cognitive diffidence between the way I was living in the world and the way I may appear to them.

ME: Was it worth all the pain and everything you went through to be who you are now?

SHEELAGH: Absolutely worth it. I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

ME: When you had to go back to work for the very first time as a woman how were you feeling?

SHEELAGH: Apprehensive, absolutely apprehensive. I did know that there had been that consultant brought in to talk to people I worked with about transitioning. I also knew it was voluntary attendance, so that meant to me that people who were overworked or looking for a break must have attended.

ME: Oh come on – not necessarily.

SHEELAGH: And the people who may have felt that god doesn't believe in that stuff wouldn't have attended.

ME: So you work with a lot of people who are like that?

SHEELAGH: No, not really, there's just one on my floor who seems like that.

ME: So what was the very first day like for you?

SHEELAGH: I was brave – I was in a brave mood – I went in there feeling I was in my power and I felt good. I don't know what I would have done if someone would have given me a really hard time, but I believe I could have stood up for myself.

ME: Did anyone give you a hard time?

SHEELAGH: No, actually the people were kinder and more connecting with me than they had ever actually been before. One of the men came over and was going to give me the big speech. He said I was going to give you a big speech and tell you what I originally thought about this big change of yours. When I first heard about your change it shocked me and I was put off by it, but I thought about you and how you would have treated anyone else who was in the same situation, and I realized that you, being such a kind person, were worthy of consideration and I considered that. That's when I cut him off and I said I just wanted a normal day. I didn't want any approbation. I didn't want any highs, I didn't want any lows, I just wanted it to be a regular workday.

ME: So this was a person who knew you as Steve in the past and was treating you with a lot of respect.

SHEELAGH: Yes I was impressed by it. I hadn't really worked with him all that much but we'd talked a few times and got along. I thought it was really cool but I just didn't want a big speech about it, especially when some of it was him not being okay with me. I work a seven hour day and I just wanted to get through that one and I didn't want to hear about how enlightened you are because you're okay with me. Honestly I don't need anybody to be okay with me, do your job, I'll do my job and then the day is done. Actually the biggest thing that made a difference that day was that there was a general section meeting and Bob came over to me as the meeting was ending. He put his hand on my shoulder and said you look good. That made my day. Especially since I knew I didn't look that good.

ME: You were still swollen, but you did look good.

SHEELAGH: I looked very good for the bride of Frankenstein.

ME: No, that's not right.

SHEELAGH: The good thing was I didn't have hair with bands of black and white in it and it wasn't frizzy and tall.

ME: That's just silly.

SHEELAGH: I had to go and get a new ID picture taken and when I look at that picture it makes me shudder.

ME: I think you're being too hard on yourself. You looked better than just Steve in a dress; you were still swollen that's all.

SHEELAGH: Well yes, it takes months and months before that kind of surgery settles down.

ME: So going back to when you started working again, was it stressful or not stressful?

SHEELAGH: Well, it definitely was stressful. I went in the there expecting the worst and I was prepared for the worst because when I left I was one person and when I came back I was another person and I wasn't sure whether that was going to fly or not going to fly. I'd worked there for four years and I was hoping I wouldn't have to deal with something extremely negative which could have happened, but it didn't. When I was done that day I didn't feel like I'd been through the wars, I actually felt like I was blessed because it could have been so much worse. As far as an environment to transition in I probably had the crème de la crème of it.

ME: Any problems going back the second day?

SHEELAGH: No I didn't have any problems going back, I guess that's one of the good things about living in an enlightened part of the world. One of the things I want to say is that every day you were there for me. You were massaging my forehead and my nose, and my jaw and you were almost in tears because you didn't want me to be in pain but you knew that it was helping me.

ME: For me that was so stressful!

SHEELAGH: I can imagine. You were taking care of me and the dogs and the bills and the food and all that kind of thing and I was just sleeping a lot.

ME: You were healing.

SHEELAGH: Yes I was, and I love you for everything you did for me back then.

ME: Awwww. You're welcome. At any point did you think you'd made a mistake getting FFS?

SHEELAGH: No, despite all the pain and being on the edge of death, I never thought for a second I'd done the wrong thing. This was something that was absolutely necessary. So there you go.

The morning of March 5th, was Sheelagh's day to return to work. While she was getting dressed for work I felt like I did when I got my daughter ready for school for the very first time. There was excitement and trepidation. A whole new life was beginning and I knew she was nervous, heck I was nervous but she reminded me of Xena warrior princess. She was brave and courageous as she was preparing herself to take on the world. Her face and neck were still puffy and swollen a little bit and would be for several more weeks, but everything from her wig, to her makeup, to her shoes were perfect.

I couldn't imagine doing what she did but she was proud of how she looked and was ready to go in and show them there was a new girl in town who was ready to be seen and heard. After she left to make the hour drive to work I went down to my studio to get lost in my work. It was hard to keep my mind centred because I kept thinking of Sheelagh and how she was doing until I couldn't stand it anymore and at 10:00 A.M. I called her to see how she was doing. When she picked up the phone she said, "Good morning Sheelagh May here." I thought this was so cute because I knew she had call display and knew it was me calling. To this day when I call her she always says that same phrase to give me a chuckle.

She was doing okay, people who didn't talk to her before still didn't, but people who knew her previously as Steve were very kind and friendly. Her department manager was great and handled everything well. Sheelagh was returning to her old job as a computer system designer and had to deal with a lot of people in her section as well as other sections. Except for one or two slip ups when someone began to say Steve instead of Sheelagh they quickly corrected themselves and things carried on well. Getting the pronouns correct – she instead of he – proved to be a little trickier for some, but Sheelagh didn't let it bother her because she knew there would be some adjustment time needed.

When she returned home she was exhausted. Not just from doing the work but she was still healing from major surgery and wasn't able to take her afternoon nap. She took two pain killers and laid down. She did it! She had returned to work as a new person and had made it through that day. I was so proud of her.

It was interesting to note that as the weeks went by when she came home she changed out of her work clothes and put on jeans and a top. In the past she was always walking around in skirts and heals (which drove me crazy), now everything was falling into place as it should.

Doubting Sheelagh

What began to follow surprised me. Sheelagh was beginning to have doubts about her looks and was feeling self-conscious. She believed everyone was staring at her because she was too tall as a woman. During this time I gave her words of encouragement, and pointed out there were tall women everywhere from basketball players to models to just other regular women.

After weeks and weeks of this I was becoming tired of constantly being her cheerleader. I just wished she realized for herself how feminine and pretty she looked. Constantly having to reassure and pat her on the back became old really fast. I was now married to and living with a woman. I mean, I had been for quite a while I know, but that thought really hit home. Sheelagh's face was beautiful, she was tall and thin, and I felt old, short and fat. It was a bit of a blow to my ego. For all outward appearances to me she was lovely, but Sheelagh didn't feel that way. She felt too tall, she thought her feet were too big, her hair was too thin and her voice wasn't consistently female. She was always too hard on herself.

Living with Sheelagh at that point in time was challenging because she was unhappy and drinking more than usual; this is what happened before she transitioned. I felt frustrated and confused because she chose to be Sheelagh and she was supposed to be happy. Yes I know, she didn't choose to become Sheelagh, she was always Sheelagh, but trapped in another's body.

I couldn't grasp why Sheelagh was unhappy since she was able to have FFS and return to her own job, and still have me. With all the upheaval she had put us through she was supposed to be happy. I was the one who wasn't terribly happy. I knew Sheelagh had done so much to get where she had and to be who she was, but I still missed our public displays of affection. It was

definitely a platonic relationship once we stepped out of our house. Going out and holding hands used to bring us closer together, now I felt a bigger divide between us since this was no longer a part of our lives.

I just wanted a nice balanced life with easygoing dogs and nice kids and a husband. Not any husband, my old husband. I wasn't happy with Sheelagh being Sheelagh and Sheelagh wasn't happy being Sheelagh; I had no idea how to help her with that. Possibly she had picked up on my mood and was reflecting it back to me.

At least I knew for certain I had a person who loved me and whom I loved. Life is life, it goes on and you can continue in the life you have or leave it, and I was continuing with this life because the good outweighed the negative. I told myself there was a divine plan of goodness for me. Many days I prayed for strength. I missed my old life, but not nearly as much as I thought I would. For myself I still didn't know whether I was gay or bisexual, maybe I was still heterosexual. Life is interesting some days.

There were times when I really didn't know what to say or how to handle what Sheelagh saw as problems. One day she went to the dentist's office and she returned home very quiet and reserved. It turned out she thought everyone in the office was laughing at her when she was leaving. Another time when leaving a doctor's office she swears the receptionist was sneering at her. Part of me believed her and just wanted to hold her and tell her everything was going to be all right. Another part just wanted to give her a shake and tell her to get a grip and stop being so paranoid.

I don't know - I guess I expected her to be happier with her transition, more so than she was. I don't get it and she doesn't know how to explain it to me. Who knows what goes on in her mind – sometimes I just wish I could wave a magic wand and make everything better for her. She is a good person but has had a hard life, and doesn't readily trust people because she expects them to let her down. I don't really understand it but I guess it's probably due to her upbringing and her time in the military.

I think she over thinks things, lacks self-confidence, and has no faith in herself. All of these things seem silly to me because when I look at her I see

a very lovely, intelligent woman. I needed for her to embrace who she was, and be happy.

One day she came home late from work and that's because she'd stopped off and bought herself a brand new sewing machine. She has always wanted to sew, so she bought a new Genome machine on sale that was gorgeous and did everything but whistle Dixie. It was nice to see her take action and purchase a machine instead of just talk about it. She said she felt passionate about this and could hardly wait to begin sewing. I think this step was huge for her! I was so proud of her for going in the store in Oshawa and doing it all on her own.

I think I almost like her better as Sheelagh some days. When you stop and think about it some women who are partnered with men spend a lot of time with their girlfriends, because their partners don't always share the same interests. Quite often my women friends bemoaned the fact their partners wanted to watch sports or go play golf instead of shopping or seeing a movie with them. At least my way I have everything all tied up into one nice neat package.

One day when I was upstairs I could hear Sheelagh talking to Elmo (one of our dogs) in a puppy sucky voice and it warmed my heart. She had come a long, long ways. I also noticed a change in my behaviour as well. I became less about me, me, me and I genuinely wanted to see Sheelagh sew and listen to her talk about it. I wanted to see her embrace the things she couldn't when she was a man, and rejoice in it. The future was going to be interesting!

I had to go to Staples for a few things and ran into my old boss from when I worked at the mall. She asked how things were and I ended up telling her all about the Steve to Sheelagh change. Needless to say she was surprised, but still supportive. I bet it wouldn't take long for everyone I used to work with to find out, due to the gossip grapevine. I wasn't sure how I felt about that. Part of me was glad I didn't have to tell them and the other part didn't want their pity, questioning looks and curious stares. I wonder if that was how Sheelagh felt sometimes.

Telling Family

My dealing with all of this was one thing but my family also had to be informed of everything that had happened. The one person I had talked to was Sissy and the following is our taped conversation.

ME: How did you feel when I called to tell you Steve was going to be a woman?

SISSY: Well I was absolutely blown away and shocked to hear that because my first thought was oh my goodness what's ahead. It was surprise and bewilderment because it was something I didn't know very much about. My second thought was that maybe Stephen was just investigating something or tilting at another windmill or learning something new because he'd been learning new languages and new religions and I remember saying to you just let him go with it, he'll investigate it all and he'll get past it.

ME: I remember that.

SISSY: That's then.

ME: It didn't work out that way.

SISSY: No it didn't.

ME: How did you feel when you were coming up for a visit and you knew you were going to meet Sheelagh for the first time. Were you nervous?

SISSY: I was full of trepidation. I didn't want to have her embarrassed and I didn't want to be embarrassed for her so it was great trepidation until I saw her and then that all changed because it just looked so normal for her.

ME: Yes that's true, but that came after the discussion at the dining room table when Sheelagh had you and Caitlin over to tell you what was happening.

SISSY: Yes, Stephen was dressed as Steve then and you had prepared me beforehand so I kind of knew what was going to be discussed but I don't think Cait did.

ME: No she didn't - it wasn't mine to tell her, it wasn't mine to tell you either but I didn't want you having another heart attack or something. I never told Sheelagh until afterwards that I'd told you, but she figured it out for herself.

SISSY: Okay.

ME: It went fairly well until Sheelagh said that one line to Caitlin that was something like, if your mom doesn't like it we can always be friends. That was the killer line that everyone uses when things are over. I said to Sheelagh later that wasn't the right thing and she said if she could have taken that back she would have.

SISSY: That did set Cait off - the tears and the yelling, well naturally because she wanted to protect her mom and she wanted to keep Steve in her life.

ME: How did you feel because you knew it was coming?

SISSY: I felt very compassionate towards Stephen because I knew how difficult it would be for him to say that to me. I felt the world move a little bit like you do - you know like when you get earth shattering news. It's like oh my goodness. Then I remember asking Stephen, why do you really feel the need to have facial surgery. I remember him saying my physical features need to change because I don't want to be the ugliest woman in Northumberland County. That's when it hit me that this was real, it's really real. My concern was for Sheelagh down the road, I read the information you gave me and I know how isolated transpeople are because they're usually left bereft by their families. My biggest concern was for you as my sister, and as long as you weren't hurt then it was okay, but as much as I love Sheelagh you're still my first concern. My loyalties lie with you over top of Sheelagh, they lie with both of you because you're my family, but you come first.

ME: I get that, it must have felt weird.

SISSY: It was, and added to that was the concern for Caitlin, because she was genuinely upset.

ME: That's right. She had known Steve for over a decade as Steve so it was a shock, but with time she was able to accept everything. When did I give the two of you the information about transpeople, was it before this discussion?

SISSY: Yes so that I would understand what you both were going through because I really didn't have an understanding. I knew that some people felt they were in the wrong body but I didn't understand the psychology behind it and I need to know about things.

ME: It's been a few years now, a lot of water has gone under the bridge.

SISSY: Yes but I was so appreciative of that book. It was called "Transgender Explained" and it helped to put everything into perspective.

ME: It helped me too!

SISSY: Yeah.

ME: So now it was real and you knew I was staying?

SISSY: Then we just got on with it because I love Sheelagh and I wanted to be as supportive as I could be and so was Peeter.

ME: Don't you find it's surreal - stuff that happens to other people.

SISSY: It is, it's quite something to be part of such a life changing experience. It's enlightening and has enriched my life to have that kind of understanding and to see things through Sheelagh's eyes and through yours.

ME: Do you remember when I decided we finally had to tell mom and I didn't want to go there alone and you said you'd come with me.

SISSY: Oh yes, but she didn't even bat an eyelash.

ME: I know, here she was being nearly ninety-one years old and we explained it to her and she got it.

SISSY: I remember you were shaking like a leaf.

ME: Well, yeah - I thought I was going to give her a heart attack or something. I said that Stephen was gone and has now become Sheelagh, and she said you're not getting a divorce are you and I said no.

SISSY: That's when she said well good then.

ME: I know! That's when I thought alright we're probably going to be okay here.

SISSY: She would ask me every now and then is your sister happy, is she okay and I'd say yes and she'd say that's alright then. Is Sheelagh happy and I said yes, and she said what more could you ask for. She was happy for you both.

ME: She was amazing. I just remember her being totally accepting and me looking at you, and you looking at me.

SISSY: We both had stunned expressions on our faces.

ME: She just said if that's what has to be done, and that's what makes her feel better, then she has to do it.

SISSY: So be it.

ME: Yeah - the one person I thought would have a problem with it, even though I hoped she wouldn't, ended up being just perfect. Mom

never got to meet Sheelagh except through photos, yet she always put the right name on birthday cards and things.

SISSY: Yes, she deserves a lot of credit.

Sheelagh wrote the most amazing letter to the rest of my family - namely my brother and three nephews and their families. I have enclosed it for those of you who can't quite grasp why your loved one is doing this to you and your family, as well as for those who are curious as to one way of conveying your feelings to your loved ones.

The Letter

> I am writing this letter to let you know of an important change that is currently taking place in my life. It is not easy to explain, but I am going to try. I have wondered a long time about who to tell, when, and how. I am not certain that this is the best way, or even the most opportune time, but I have come to a point when I cannot hide any longer. For most of my life I have struggled with what is medically referred to as gender dysphoria, a collective name for a condition in which the biological/physical sex is not consistent with the perception of gender for the person. I began the important process that will result in significant changes as I intend to live the rest of my life as a woman.
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> The decision was not an easy one, but the only one. This is not a life-style choice, or being done on a whim. Gender dysphoria is a medical condition whose only treatment is to live life as the gender you are – or die. If I have decided to reveal so much about me today, it is just because I cannot accept any longer the minimization or denial of what and who I am. I want to be able to communicate normally and honestly about my life, without subterfuge, lies, and fear. I hope that no matter what your reaction is, you'll take the time to read this letter entirely. It has nothing to do with being transvestite, crossdresser, drag queen or female impersonator. It has also nothing to do with sex (or desire or preferences) but everything to do with perception of gender identity. Unfortunately, most people equate the concepts of gender and sex, but it is - really - not the same thing. Sex is the fact that a person's physical characteristics are essentially male or female. Gender refers to the general presentation, to the physical characteristics, to belief, to behaviour which society relies upon so as to classify a person as "masculine" or "feminine." Gender identity refers to the inner conviction of a person because it is defined as belonging to one of these categories.
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> Gender expression of a person (what that person chooses (or not) to reveal to society) may or may not match their gender identity, because our behaviour is often conditioned by strong social pressures. For most people, sex, gender identity and gender expression, the social role we play, are consistent one with another. However, sometimes some people feel that their body does not match what they feel to be, and the way they are expected to interact in society is very different from what they would like. When this happens, it causes a very strong and constant discomfort, which is at best extremely difficult to control. Various degrees exist, and unfortunately it is a condition that worsens over time.

This is not a mental illness and is a recognized medical condition for which treatments are appropriate in only certain cases. Personally, I have always known, in fact as early as age five, that I was different from other children. I was scared to death to tell anyone how I felt and society was not what it is today. So I made every effort to act the way boys were expected to. This strategy worked, and I decided that I'd be better off putting all that behind me. Although I had to fight at times with all my energy to repress these feelings and transform them, I decided I could manage the situation without doing anything about it. In 1997 I sought medical help for my problem, but none was forthcoming, and at the same time my prior marriage collapsed I was working full time and going to school part time as well.

Some of you may wonder why I married Virgi. That is in fact very simple: I met the person I wanted to spend the rest of my life with; I believed my condition could be eliminated through denial and I believed that it would be manageable. However, a few years ago some events made me realize that I was growing unhappy because I was not addressing something in my life. I searched for solutions and different routes to happiness. The thought that it may be gender dysphoria would always flit through my mind, but I always denied it. I felt if I acknowledged it, then my battle to avoid the treatment for it would be lost. I realized that while I had established meaningful friendships, I could never really be myself. I also realized I was increasingly questioning who I really was. I did not want to impose a miserable life upon my family, so I started therapy with the hope to achieve balance. However, after a long process, and a year of talks with Virgi, the only viable choice ahead of me was to recognize the truth, be brave and again seek medical help so I could live the rest of my life as a woman. For what it is worth, most people's reaction to my news have been remarkable in compassion, understanding and support.

Over a year ago, I started seeking medical help. After a careful and detailed screening, I have been accepted to enter a very strict, internationally agreed standard of medical care. I am now followed by a team of doctors, comprising expertise from various disciplines. I was placed under Contra-Hormone Therapy in May 2011, and have now entered a so - called "real-life" stage.

Last month I completed Facial Feminization Surgery that removed the genetic traits of a male from my face. For some time now I have been living two lives. At work, I was known as Stephen or Steve, but to my friends, my closest family and almost everywhere else, I am a woman known as Sheelagh ("Sheila"). In preparation for the real-life phase, I have legally changed my name to Sheelagh Tara May. Similarly, all my registrations at where I work (phone, email, badge, etc) will be eventually changed to Sheelagh May. Since I have legally changed my first name to Sheelagh, it is courteous to now refer to me by that name. It is also courteous to now refer to me as 'she' rather than 'he'. I know this is going to be hard for you to adjust to, even with the best will. I know there will be an adjustment period where you will unconsciously use he, him or even Stephen instead of she, her or Sheelagh. I will be patient, and in fact do understand. Do not worry about it. I am still the same person, and I hope you will continue to relate to me like you have in the past.

I want to assure you that I will still be the person you have known for the past thirteen years. It is important for me that you understand I did not play a character when I interacted with you during all these years. I had just muted certain aspects for what I hope to be now obvious reasons. I hope you will find no difference in your dealings with me in my new appearance.

> With luck, this will all be short wonder, and eventually new perceptions will overlay the image of the person I was, and life will go on. I am currently trying to address all the people who need to know before the end of this month. It is not my intention to either embarrass or upset my friends and family, although I am realistic enough to know that I will not be readily accepted by everyone and that some may have difficulty accepting me. I will respect this right, but know that I am not interested in engaging in futile arguments if you strongly disapprove of what I'm doing. I ask for your tolerance, and, if you can supply it, a continuation of your friendship.
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> So, what if you have other questions? I am prepared to talk with you. If you don't feel comfortable talking with me, I've listed some books, articles, websites and movies I feel deal with the subject in a good way. You should be able to find these easily. Please also feel free to contact me or Virgi if you feel this will help our relationship in the future.
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> Communication seldom does any harm. I am very flexible and open to suggestions that minimize difficulties and awkward situations. I acknowledge that it may be difficult for you and I am eager to help things go smoothly. With Love, Sheelagh (formerly Stephen).

After I saw the letter I was so proud of Sheelagh and how she had so beautifully put her feelings and reasons out there for all to read. My only other thought was my family had better be kind and accepting of her or they would have to deal with me.

The Naples Trip

We were planning a weekend trip to a bed and breakfast in Naples, New York State and part of me was looking forward to it and the other part wanted to hide out at home. What would it be like with Sheelagh and the other people? Would crossing the border be a problem? Will this trip make her happy or anxious? Society is tolerant of gays as a concept but don't want to see open displays of affection in front of them because then it is too real. Gay in theory is one thing, reality is another. I think I was that way at one time; I still am occasionally taken by surprise if I see two men kissing.

The day came for us to leave for Naples New York. The puppies were boarded at the kennel and we headed to the border in our Nissan 350-Z. It was a fun little sports car but again it felt strange to me to be traveling in a sporty convertible with another woman instead of a man. I worried about people being intolerant of two gay women together, scared that they could harass us when we had the top down, or slash the top when it was up. Some people take issues with gays while others couldn't care less. I just had to let

it go and believe everything would be okay. Crossing the border at Kingston was extremely easy, and we had a lovely time shopping at Destiny USA before heading down to Naples.

Our room was very pretty with a huge four poster bed and a beautiful large bathroom with a giant Jacuzzi. After we got settled in we went out looking for a place to eat. We ended up in a Chinese restaurant and had a lovely meal. No one looked at us twice and everything was fine. At breakfast the next morning there were three other couples besides us and we all had to eat at one big table. I knew Sheelagh's anxiety level was high but she did really well. No one asked us about our kids – maybe because we were a same sex couple they thought we didn't have any. We did talk about dogs and politics. Everyone there hated Obama, but Sheelagh was good and didn't enter into a debate about the merits of Obama with a bunch of diehard Republicans. I did feel better once breakfast was over.

That afternoon we had a wine tasting tour lined up and had a great time. After a few stops I stopped worrying what people thought when we shared our taste testing glasses. The power of a little alcohol! We ended up buying quite a few bottles to take home with us. That evening we sat outside and drank some wine, watched lightning bugs and talked.

Our last night there Sheelagh drank a lot of wine and basically went to bed around 10:30 P.M. She awoke around 4:00 A.M. sighing and moving around a lot until she woke me up. I had her put her head on my shoulder and asked if there was anything she wanted to say and she said no, but kept on sighing. This sighing continued and eventually I got her to open up a little. She was sad and disappointed about things from her past (she gave no elaboration) and also said she was upset about not having sex. I knew that was coming – on Friday we arrived late after a long drive and shopping all day and were exhausted. Saturday night Sheelagh kept drinking and couldn't possibly have had sex. On Sunday I gave her a choice of staying inside and having sex or going out and feeding the animals. (They had horses, sheep and a pig where we were staying). And she picked feeding the animals.

Sex can be hit or miss when you have someone taking estrogen daily with little or no testosterone in their system – a lot of times it's a miss. I felt her frustration but found it hard to believe she thought she would always be able to maintain an erection without testosterone. I don't know if it was wishful thinking or something she had read, but this was one thing that truly bothered Ms. Sheelagh.

We had a lovely drive home and had time to stop at an outlet mall. I enjoyed shopping with Sheelagh instead of having her just sit in the car and read, which is what happened before her transition. I find it's nicer to shop together because I loved helping her pick out clothes and seeing her excitement when something fit and looked amazing. We both were able to find a few things and enjoyed the sunny ride home.

Emotions

With each passing day I was finding handling Sheelagh's emotions easier. I still found her reactions to things peculiarly disconcerting. I had grown used to the calm, rational Zen-like responses that were typical of her before she began transitioning. Now I was finding that Sheelagh could be quick to react and respond to me the way I did to her. She was a quick study in learned behaviour, mine.

Sheelagh spent a lot of time feeling bad about past transgressions and past problems. As far as I was concerned the past is in the past and you can't change anything so why dwell on it. Perhaps she was trying to get things in perspective or just getting used to being a woman, I'm just not sure.

The one thing I noticed was that Sheelagh was more talkative after her transition than she had been before it. One night after copious amounts of wine Sheelagh told me she might want to have GRS (Genital Reconstruction Surgery). I think she wanted or expected me to just say okay go for it, but I just couldn't do that. Obviously I wanted her to be happy but I didn't think that would make me happy.

I knew our sex life was hit or miss when it came to orgasms for her, but I wasn't willing to compromise any further. I told her all of this and with the

late hour coupled with the wine, the discussion quickly escalated into an argument. I remember her saying, “Fuck you!” and then she stormed up to our room. I followed her and laid behind her on the bed and grabbed her in a hug and held her until she settled down.

After she fell asleep I laid there wondering where my life was going to go from here. If she went through with the operation and we both hated our sex life, and ended up resenting each other, then maybe things would be over between us. If I could continue to roll with the punches we would both be okay.

I love Sheelagh. It’s something visceral that I feel deep down inside. I never felt this type of connection with my first husband. I guess that’s why this whole thing made me feel so sad, it was a big snowball that just kept on rolling and picking up speed and kept getting bigger. I loved our plans for the future and I’d just got my glass studio set up the way I liked it, but if I had to leave I would. I would just pack everything up and move back to St. Catharines where my family lived.

My heart would be broken – all I wanted was for Sheelagh to love me as much as I loved her – that’s not asking for the moon or maybe it was, I don’t know anymore. I know she had to be true to herself, but I also knew that for our relationship to work we both had to be happy. I truly believe everything happens for a reason, so was this to push me away and encourage me to return to St. Catharines or was it to increase my patience and empathy – I’m still not really sure of the answer.

One night I heard the coyotes and they sounded so forlorn out there. I no longer felt hopeless or helpless, but I did feel a bit forlorn. I hoped Sheelagh could just be happy without GRS. I don’t know how I would relate to her sexually if she had the operation. I have heard that the amount of healing and aftercare is huge with that type of surgery and in the end would it make her happier? Did she feel driven to have GRS so she wouldn’t feel at odds within herself? I can’t even begin to think what that must feel like, but the ball was in her court and I just had to play the wait and see game.

It was the middle of May and Sissy wanted a break and therefore was coming up to visit for a few days. This was always fun as we would go antiquing and shopping together. Sissy and Sheelagh always got along famously; Sissy has always been one of Sheelagh's biggest supporters. The two of them think along the same lines and sometimes it's kind of scary what the two of them come up with. Sissy saw a huge change in Sheelagh – physically the puffiness and swelling had gone down considerably to reveal her beautiful face, but she thought Sheelagh's heart had grown and she was more relaxed and happy.

It was nice to get that input from an outside source because I was too involved sometimes to see Sheelagh in the bigger picture as a happy woman, as opposed to someone who was radically changing my life in ways I didn't want changed.

Most days I found myself quite happy but there were times I would throw myself a pity party and feel bad for how my life had changed so dramatically now that I found myself married to a woman. The bond, or connection, Sheelagh and I share is so strong I feel like we can get through anything, other times I find myself asking, " Why did this happen to me?"

Motorcycle

Sheelagh had been talking about getting a smaller motorcycle to replace the beast we currently owned. She wanted to get a white Harley Davidson Sportster with pink flames on it. I thought it would be very uncool to be seen driving that, but she didn't think so. She wanted it because it was pretty – sometimes she drives me crazy.

We did have to sell the bike we had, it was a Suzuki Boulevard C109R, 1800 cc. A bike that was now much too heavy for Sheelagh to handle. It was clear to me that the machine was dangerous because even before she started CHT, she tore several disks in her back when the bike nearly slid down an embankment.

I no longer wanted to be her motorcycle passenger because I didn't think she could safely keep herself, me and the bike upright since she'd lost some

of her muscular strength as her testosterone levels dropped. This was going to be the end of the motorcycle chapter of my life. I took motorcycle lessons a few years before to try driving my own bike, but failed miserably.

For the past six years we had gone out every weekend and shared motorbike adventures together. The ending was bittersweet – part of me would miss the closeness and the feeling of being free spirits together, and the other part of me felt it was time to put away my leather jacket and helmet. We had a nasty accident in 2002 and another one a couple of years later. I no longer wanted to tempt the fates.

Sheelagh, on the other hand, wanted to trade in the Boulevard for a lighter and more manageable bike. After much researching and sourcing out bikes she bought herself a 2011 Triumph America 860 cc. She told me that this was nearly a clone of her first big bike. She had always wanted this style of bike again, but it had gone out of production long ago. She could buy one now since she didn't have to worry about carrying a passenger, and the company had started building a new improved version of her old Triumph. The America was a lovely blue and sparkling white bike - very feminine looking without being over the top. She was extremely happy with her choice. I couldn't really see her going off by herself on the weekends to ride, but I could be wrong. We would see.

We had been talking for awhile about replacing my 2004 RAV4 with a newer model – used, but new to me. We went to look around the lot on a Sunday when it was closed. Sheelagh walked up to a white Matrix, walked around it and said, "I'm going to get this one!"

I couldn't believe it. She had just bought a brand new motorcycle and had a red truck that was only a few years old. She went on to tell me she wanted a sporty car, not a big hulking truck. She wanted to separate herself as far as possible from who she was before. Since we live in the country mostly men drove pickup trucks – so I got it. We went home and crunched numbers and decided to trade in the old RAV4, the truck and the Nissan 350 Z for a newer RAV and a Matrix.

The next day I went to the dealership and by a trick of fate I got the dealership's owner looking after me. After we were able to bring him all our vehicles to look at, we ended up making an even trade – he got three of ours for two of his.

One day after work Sheelagh met me there to sign the papers. It was a warm day and I was waiting outside. She came across the parking lot in a blue top, and a blue fluffy maxi skirt looking very pretty. I knew it took a lot for her to come in and sign the papers because the last time she was there was before her transition. She hadn't even been at the dealership in order to test drive her chosen car. I was the one who did the test drive for her.

We were treated well and she handled herself perfectly. We walked out of there two happy campers with new to us cars. No more pickup trucks for Sheelagh, she was now the proud owner of a sporty little Matrix.

Living

I should mention that during the past year I had been working at home in my studio. I was a stained glass artist trying to make a name for myself while making fun art. My "go to" place for thinking was my studio. I could go there and forget everything or to think things over. I work from home and Sheelagh worked at her job an hour away, five days a week. We enjoyed each other's company and the ebb and flow of life had settled into a nice routine. That routine was going to change because it was soon going to be our thirteenth wedding anniversary. We were going to celebrate it by spending the weekend in Kingston Ontario. It has always been a special place for us because we celebrated our tenth anniversary there back when Sheelagh was still Steve. Now we were going there as two women.

We left for Kingston on a Saturday, stopped and got some wine, and made it to our hotel overlooking the water for check in time. Our room had a balcony where we could sit outside and enjoy the day. The weekend was great, the sex was great and the hotel staff were wonderful. Being a female couple in the city and at the hotel wasn't as weird or scary as I thought it would be, we felt like we fit right in. We have a deep love and

understanding of each other that overrides most bumps along the way. Celebrating thirteen married years together and feeling right in our new relationship as two women was extra icing on the cake.

Our Social Orbits

We don't have a wide circle of friends and mainly did outings together without others. I tended to go to St. Catharines at least once a month because that's where I grew up and my family still lived there. Sheelagh grew up in Peterborough and her mom and dad had passed away. She does have contact with her half-sister and her niece but that's pretty much it for the family she's in contact with.

She had had two good friends from over twenty years ago. One stopped contact abruptly when he learned of Sheelagh's transition, while the other person never faltered. I find it interesting how people can drop someone they've known for almost a lifetime due to a gender change. Sheelagh will always be the same good person but just looks and sounds differently. I'm glad some people are more open minded than others. I know Sheelagh felt hurt when she no longer heard from that person she'd called a friend for over twenty-five years.

Neighbour
We lived out in the countryside and we were quite isolated from both the city and the nearby houses. This was our choice so I guess the gender change wasn't felt by many people besides our families.

I found it interesting though, when our next door neighbour invited me over for tea. She started asking me where my husband was. Her house was close enough to ours that she saw that there wasn't a man cutting our large lawn anymore. She had noticed over the years that Steve drove a bright red Toyota truck, exactly like her brother's and she hadn't seen it, or Steve around. So at that point I told her that Steve was now Sheelagh and had sold the truck.

"Oh that's fine - live and let live," she said, and then proceeded to talk to me about her recent trip abroad. I thought that went well.

Later when I was home I started second guessing myself about what I'd told her about Sheelagh. Maybe Sheelagh wouldn't have wanted me to say anything to a neighbour? I felt mixed emotions with regard to this because I didn't want to hurt my wife, but I also didn't want to live a lie and tell lies to our neighbours. In the end when I told Sheelagh about it, she wasn't terribly happy. She understood that I did it to maintain our integrity. We lived in a rural area and gossip like this would travel quickly. She was apprehensive about how other neighbours who heard this second hand news would react. It made her feel anxious, but it was important that we were true to ourselves and could hold our heads high regardless of anyone's misgivings.

Sheela's Orbit

Sheelagh was having her own challenges finding her place in the world. I asked her the following questions and recorded her answers.

ME: When you're with a group of women do you feel like you're more accepted in that group than before?

SHEELAGH: It kind of depends - if no one knows my past it's much easier. I'm comfortable there but not totally at ease. Women who know my past don't know what to do with me, they don't know how to relate to me because they're used to dealing with someone strictly female or male, they're not used to dealing with someone who has a history of both - they have no idea how that I fit into their world.

ME: Do you have transsexual friends?

SHEELAGH: No I don't. I have had some online friends but no one in real life.

ME: So do you feel alone?

SHEELAGH: Yes, I feel really isolated. I haven't found any transsexual people I understand or can relate to. I have male work friends and that's about it. So here I am.

ME: What online places did you find for transgendered individuals?

SHEELAGH: There's Laura's Playground, Susans.org, and there's also Transgendered Canada. There are very few people who show up in the chat rooms who I wanted to get to know.

ME: Would it be easier for you to fit in if you lived in a bigger city as opposed to rural Ontario?

SHEELAGH: Fitting in - I don't know - the fitting in part probably affects being in a social group, but I don't feel like I'm being judged doing everyday errands around Cobourg. Work isn't a problem. Some parts of the world I might fit in better, but I don't think gay women have too hard of a time fitting in when compared to gay males. At the moment I can't really be optimistic about being myself. Just being a normal woman in a social setting, without being judged by people I know, as well as people I don't know. We'll see how it goes.

Flat Chested Dilemma

The year Sheelagh celebrated her fifty-fifth birthday was her first as Sheelagh. She was happy and enjoyed her day. My family sent cards and my daughter dropped in with a surprise, so the day went by happily. All of the swelling from her facial reconstructive surgery had gone down, she'd found a wig that she liked, and discovered her love of style could be expressed well as a woman.

One thing that would come up now and again was how unhappy she was with her breast size. She had read and had hoped that the hormones she was taking would increase their size. The hormones seemed to help a little bit but not as much as she'd hoped for. She wore a bra stuffed with fibrefill to give her a more feminine body. Unfortunately, August in Ontario is hot and humid and she was not happy being so overheated all the time.

It was around the end of August she started talking about getting breast augmentation surgery. My goodness, when I heard that I immediately

flashed back in time to Chicago and all the blood and bruises. I didn't think I could go through that again and that's when I just shut down and said, "No we are not doing this." I couldn't do it. All the waiting during the surgery, hoping she would come out of the general anesthetic okay, seeing her in pain and having to be the nurse who makes it all better. I couldn't even think about it. I wanted no part of it.

Over the next few months I knew she was spending time researching doctors on the Internet but it was something we didn't talk about. She knew if she mentioned it I would give her a hard time about it, and looking back she was correct. At that time I thought she was just wasting money and being selfish. I didn't mind her breasts being small so why did she have to make them bigger. Who was she trying to impress?

She believed that because she was so tall she had to have bigger breasts in order to be seen as a woman by the outside world. She was being misgendered on a regular basis usually by short people. The pain of being called Sir after having endured the difficulties and pains in order to get where she was in transition was intense and humiliating. Undergoing more pain to avoid being misgendered seemed to her to be a fair trade, even though she knew it wasn't going to be just the pain of surgery, but also having to live with the turmoil this would create in our relationship.

I didn't agree with her. I said that's why you can use a padded bra and never have to experience sagging breasts. That's when Sheelagh lost it. Sheelagh rarely raises her voice but she did and said, "Do you have any bloody idea how hot a padded bra is in the summer?" With tears in her eyes she threw it at me and said, "You wear it and see how you like it." It was then, at that moment, I knew she was going to have the surgery no matter what I said or how badly I didn't want her to.

New Mexico

We were looking forward to October because we were going on a two week holiday. We left on a Saturday for New Mexico. We had never been there before and we both had always wanted to go. We landed in Albuquerque, rented a car and then were off to Santa Fe. By this point I was used to

dealing with car rental agents, so I was no longer fazed by dealing with them. We found the Turquoise Trail and followed it up to Santa Fe. We enjoyed the old town, it was quaint and pretty and packed with people; that being said no one paid any attention to us. One of the fun things we discovered there were agave margaritas. These packed a punch and tasted delicious.

The next day we took the high road to Taos which was a scenic highway instead of the freeway. Taos is a small village with funky stores and artists with galleries – all very open minded and welcoming.

Another town nearby was called Arroyo Seco and they had a very cool mercantile store. We had fun finding some souvenirs and when we headed back to our car, two men in a truck slowed right down and whistled at us and called out. This was unsettling since we were basically in the middle of nowhere in northern New Mexico, and so we ignored them and hurried to our car and locked the doors. Definitely unsettling.

At Taos we stayed for three days at a bed and breakfast and it was interesting that the owners were LGBT friendly but the other guests not so much. For two of the three days we had interesting conversations with another couple until they left. On the third day we were ignored by the other heterosexual couples that were present. Since we were the only gay couple present it was pretty apparent that they “didn’t like our kind” so I was glad that was our last day there. I used to enjoy B&B’s but now the anonymity a hotel holds seemed to work better for us.

We made our way across the broad deserts of New Mexico and Arizona to Winslow and had a lovely stay at La Posada hotel. This was our second time there and it was fun to sit and watch the trains go by. The next day we headed to Sedona where we had rented a house for the week. Sedona is a cool, laid back town full of interesting people and vortexes. We had a wonderful time exploring and shopping and enjoying each other’s company. We had such a lovely time we were sad when it was time to go home.

We were back home for a week and then I left to go to St. Catharines because it was my mother's ninety-first birthday and I wanted to be there in case it was her last one. Mom was in good spirits and enjoyed her day. The next day I headed back home and Sissy came with me for a visit like she often did. Sissy and Sheelagh are two people who get along extremely well as I have mentioned. Sometimes I think they both came from the same mother ship because the two of them can sit and talk for hours over a few bottles of wine. Sissy's love and support of Sheelagh has only deepened over time. The time they spend together is never strained, and it made my heart happy that Sheelagh was comfortable and at peace when chatting with Sissy. After three or four days my brother-in-law would drive up and pick up my sister and they would drive back to St. Catharines.

Christmas

Christmas was spent quietly at home. I went out of my way to make sure I got Sheelagh "girly" things. She really loved wearing bright colours and glitzy jewelry because she had spent her life wishing she could, so now the sky was the limit. If it was sparkly, shiny or pink she loved it. I understood she wanted to distance herself as far as possible from any manly shapes or colours because she had been stuck wearing them all her life.

She still felt that given her height, if she wore any dark colours or plaid shirts people were more likely to view her as a man. I really didn't think that possible, given her feminine face and long hair, but one time she was checking out at the liquor store and she was "Sirred" not "Ma'amed" and she was mortified. Some people can be so thoughtless in their dealings with others, and that really hurt Sheelagh deeply.

On December 31st, we watched the ball drop in Times Square and shared a kiss. We had made it through Sheelagh's first year of being a woman…… And we were still together. It was definitely a year I'll never forget.

CHAPTER THREE
2013

January

January didn't start off very well for Sheelagh due to a bad cold that landed her in bed for a few days. It didn't start off well for me because Sheelagh had decided to have breast augmentation surgery. She had spent a great deal of time looking into different doctors and planned having consultations with two of them in Toronto.

She went to the office of the first one where she was surrounded by women who were at least a foot shorter than she was. When she checked in she had to give her medical insurance card to the receptionist. The receptionist took the card and when she saw the M on the card under sex, she smirked and turned to the other staff and laughed. Sheelagh was horribly embarrassed but needed to see the doctor so she stayed. The doctor agreed to do surgery on her even though she was a transsexual, but Sheelagh left feeling alienated, judged, and less of a woman.

Upon leaving she checked her phone to see if there was a message from the office of the other doctor. He was from Chicago and she had to get the location of the hotel he was speaking at in order to talk with him about surgery. When she found no message she contacted his office and found out that she hadn't been given an appointment. Feeling sad and disheartened she returned home.

Sheelagh later received an estimate of eleven thousand dollars for the surgery, which was roughly twice the cost of breast surgery on a non

transwoman. At this point she felt she would be better off to look for a surgeon who regularly worked with transsexual people. The doctor she hadn't been able to see was one of those doctors but fate had intervened that day and she missed seeing him.

I found it hard to believe it was one year ago we were in Chicago for her FFS. A whole year had gone by so quickly. I thought Sheelagh looked very pretty since all the swelling had receded. I totally see her and accept her as the woman she is – I no longer got my pronouns confused and our life together was going along quite well. I just had to get my mind wrapped around the idea of breast surgery.

Valentines in Cicero

That year our Valentine's day present to each other was a long weekend away shopping in New York State. It was a platonic Valentine's Day and we stayed at the Holiday Inn Express and went shopping at Destiny USA. The one thing that marred the weekend was when we were riding in an elevator with another man and he said something to me and I responded. Sheelagh accused me of flirting with him, which couldn't have been further from the truth. She sometimes had her moments of feeling insecure and that was definitely one of them. I mean really, if I was going to flirt I certainly wouldn't do it in front of her. Other than that it was a fun weekend and the weather cooperated so we didn't have to drive home through any snowstorms.

Sheelagh was getting sick and tired of wearing wigs, she enjoyed the styles but they were extremely hot to wear. She had experienced eczema on her scalp due to perspiration being trapped between the wig and her head.

She went to see a hair specialist in Toronto because no matter how well a wig looked, it was still a wig. Synthetic wigs were cheaper and lighter but clearly recognizable as a wig. Human hair wigs were priced in the thousands of dollars and were both heavier and hotter than synthetic ones.The doctor she saw was fantastic and she made an appointment to have hair surgery done over the summer.

Red Hatted

In order for Sheelagh to meet some new women friends we joined a Red Hat Society in our area. The women were very nice, but Sheelagh couldn't connect with them in any way. When they chatted about their children and grandchildren Sheelagh felt left out, and when they complained about their husbands she had nothing to add to the conversation. When it was finally time to leave, she was more than happy to go.

Sheelagh was definitely way out of her comfort zone with that group. The queen of the group came up with the idea of an outing to see the play Spamalot. We both enjoy Monty Python so we said we'd love to go. On play day – three of us showed up – the queen, Sheelagh and myself. We enjoyed the afternoon but found it odd that no one else came; Sheela's thoughts immediately went to blaming herself. She believed they didn't like her so that was why they hadn't shown up. I think they just had other plans for a Saturday afternoon, but Sheelagh was left feeling sad. Just when her confidence was increasing something like that comes along and she's back to square one.

Breast Augmentation

I wondered why having FFS wasn't enough for Sheelagh to consider herself to be a woman. I asked her why she needed breast augmentation as well.

Sheelagh said to me, "I thought the hormones would create breasts but they didn't do their job properly. A six foot one inch woman with A cup breasts isn't immediately recognized by people as a woman. I needed bigger breasts to pass."

So, in May we made the long drive down into the US for a consultation with the doctor Sheelagh found to do her breast augmentation surgery. The consult went well and Sheelagh had a surgery date set up for June. When she told me this I was livid!

I could not believe she would pick June for surgery when we had a vacation already booked in Provincetown for that same month. I could just see us down there on holiday with Sheelagh feeling awful and needing help to get through the day, instead of the two of us enjoying ourselves. She wouldn't even be able to drink so going out and having cocktails was out of the question. Needless to say the trip was cancelled because the surgery took precedence.

In June Sheelagh's operation took place in the morning and she was released that afternoon. She was sore but pumped full of pain killers, so I easily got her into our car and drove her to where we were going to stay. After a rest she woke up starving because she had not eaten since 6:00 P.M. the night before. Sheelagh said she was really, really hungry and surprised me by asking for a Big Mac! This was unusual because I couldn't remember the last time we had had fast food. Since she had just had surgery I thought it would be a great treat, so we dined on burgers and fries.

The next day I had to drive Sheelagh to the doctor's office for a post surgical check up. The doctor took off the large dressings and inspected the incisions, and said everything was fine. Sheelagh thought the implants were placed exceptionally high and looked unnatural. The doctor placed an elastic bandage across the top of Sheelagh's breasts and around her back. It wasn't clear what that was supposed to accomplish, but after that we went back to the our accommodation. It would be a week before Sheelagh could have the final follow up and we could return home. We past the time with short outings to unique shopping malls, nearby towns and local shops.

Mom Dies

On our last night there I received a call from my brother- in–law. He was calling to say my mom had been taken to the hospital and I should come home as soon as possible. We were a nine hour drive away from our home, and twelve hours away from where my mom lived. I had to get home.

The next morning we had to go to the doctor's office for the final check up, and we were on time for the appointment. Unfortunately we still had to wait over an hour because the doctor was running late. The elastic bandage was

removed and Sheelagh was given instruction in “breast exercise”. It consisted of pressing the upper outside part of the breast towards the lower inside part. This was something Sheelagh had never heard of anyone else having to do and thought it strange at the time.

We finally were able to leave at noon and drove straight home. Sheelagh managed to help out by driving for an hour, but that was all she could manage due to the surgery. We arrived home at 8:30 P.M. and I was exhausted and Sheelagh was sore and tired. I was going to leave right then for St. Catharines but she talked me out of it and said I needed to get some sleep first. I knew she was right so I went to bed and got up at 3:00 A.M. and drove to St. Catharines so I was there by 6:00 A.M. I felt awful about leaving Sheelagh on her own so soon after surgery but I had to be with my mom to say my goodbyes. I didn’t want to leave Sheelagh but she was great about it and totally understanding.

My mom’s wish was always to die at home and Sissy was doing her best to honour that wish. Mom reached the point where she was not able to swallow and she was in tremendous pain so an ambulance was called. After spending one night in the hospital, she was given Dilaudid and Hydrocodone and sent home because that was where she wanted to die. When I reached St. Catharines she was back in her own bed and when I came around the corner into her bedroom her face lit up, she grabbed my hand and said, “Gin – I knew you’d make it!” She knew she was dying and went in and out of lucidity. I stayed there that day with her from 6:00 A.M. until 11:00 P.M. – by then I was absolutely exhausted, as was my sister. We chose to go to Sissy’s house to sleep in real beds and returned the next morning.

The night nurse said mom had spent a very quiet restful night. After the nurse left, Sissy and I spent the day there taking turns sitting with mom – it was heartbreaking but I wouldn’t have been anywhere else. At 5:30 P.M. my brother-in-law came by with chicken and salads for dinner. The three of us were sitting in the living room of my mom’s apartment eating and chatting, when I felt this strange feeling and I stood up and said I was going to go and check on mom. I walked into her bedroom and saw right away she had stopped breathing. She was still warm to the touch so I held her

hand and cried a little. After a few minutes I went back out to the living room and said, “I think mom has died.”

They both jumped up and ran to the bedroom, I followed. They both cried and when I touched mom’s cheek it had gone cold. That’s when all the phone calls had to be made to the coroner, the funeral home, and all family members. When I called Sheelagh she was a calm and gentle presence for me and was absolutely wonderful saying all the things I needed to hear.

I missed Sheelagh so much and since it was the weekend, and there wasn’t anything I could do in St.Catharines until Monday, I headed home for the weekend. It was wonderful to see Sheelagh and have her hold me and tell me everything was going to be okay. She looked good but I didn’t want to squeeze her too hard because I was worried about popping her new breasts. She told me it wasn’t possible, but I didn’t believe her. I thought she needed more time to heal.

I was just there for the two days and then I drove back to St. Catharines again on Monday. Sheelagh had to stay at home because we were having a new furnace installed and we couldn’t cancel it. She was taking it easy but had to get her own meals and make her own tea. She wasn’t getting as spoiled as she would have been had I been able to be home with her. She was just great about it and was holding up well.

Sissy and I visited the funeral home and made arrangements. I had written the obituary (at two o’clock in the morning, when I couldn’t sleep) so we submitted that, and then we had to go back to the apartment to divide things up and get everything cleared out. An exhausting and time consuming experience. Two days later was mom’s funeral and Sheelagh drove herself down to be there. I really wanted her there, but I had told her it wasn’t necessary. I didn’t want her to hurt her stitches or get so tired she drove off the highway. Needless to say she came, and her presence gave me strength.

I gave the eulogy for my mom, and just being able to look out and see Sheelagh’s face and the love in her eyes helped me get through it. It was a time of sadness but my mom was ninety-one years old and sick, so we all knew it was a blessing for her to go on to her next life.

After the funeral my family returned to Sissy's house for the wake. I hadn't seen most of them for a few years and none of them had ever met Sheelagh before except for a few minutes at the funeral home. I could see my nieces staring at her when they thought no one was looking. It was definitely the first time they had ever met a transwoman but they were fine with Sheelagh. Everyone seemed to be very accepting of her and Sheelagh was quite comfortable being there. She spent the night and left the next morning to return to work.

After all the loose ends were tied up I returned home. Sheelagh was wonderful, she took on my work around the house and looked after our two dogs and gave me time to heal. She forced me out of the house the following weekend to drive up to Prince Edward County for their lavender festival. The last thing I wanted to do was go outside and be with people but that day was the best day. Sheelagh knew what I needed when I didn't and I can honestly tell you I was happily surprised she was so empathetic. Don't get me wrong I know she loves me and cares about me but for so long everything had been about her, that I thought she'd be upset looking after me, but no – she was caring, giving, and really put herself out to be there for me.

We're a team – Team May is what we have taken to referring to ourselves as and it suits us. I'm there for her and she's there for me and we team up to take on the world. We celebrated our fourteenth anniversary with a special dinner and some champagne. Sheelagh had been told by the doctor not to exert herself for six weeks after the surgery, so love making was not an option. Things continued going well and we were on the same wave length and in sync with each other. I enjoyed every single day.

Hair Surgery

The third week in July Sheelagh and I were going to Toronto for three days because she was scheduled to have hair surgery. It was going to be a seven hour operation where they take a strip of scalp off the back of your head and then place each follicle into another part of your head. In this case she

was getting it done to create a lower hair line that would look more feminine while also covering up the scar from her FFS. For this she received a local anesthetic and just had to lie very still.

My daughter Cait was living in Toronto at the time and we spent the day together shopping and catching up. At 5:00 P.M. I went over to the clinic and picked up Sheelagh. She had a scarf loosely wrapped around her head to protect the incisions from the dirt and wind. I took her back to the hotel and she slept soundly. The next morning she returned to the clinic where they washed her hair and checked the incisions. Everything looked great and the doctor said she could go home.

The doctor believed the surgery to be successful but we'd have to wait six to nine months to see if and how much hair growth there would be. Sheelagh had to continue to wear her wig to work but once home had to keep it off in order to let the air get to the follicles. I am happy to say that it was a success and all sorts of little baby hairs started sprouting up.

Cait Visit

My birthday is usually a quiet time that Sheelagh and I share together because the kids have their own lives and as long as I get a card or a phone call I'm happy. This year my daughter and her partner dropped in for a visit on the weekend.

We all had a lovely time over tea and muffins, it was a lovely birthday surprise. They are supportive of us both and totally accept Sheelagh as she is. It is so nice to have family who love you no matter what.

Tattoo Revision

That August I had the tattoo on my upper arm changed. On my arm I had a heart with Steve's name on it. I'd had it since 1998 and now I was having it redone as a heart with flowers and Sheelagh's name. It looked beautiful and we both loved it. Sheelagh was deeply moved by the fact I'd wear her name on my arm for the world to see.

I knew Sheelagh was not happy with the two tattoos she had done before her transition. She felt they were to manly looking. I took photos of Sheelagh's tattoos with me to my tattoo artist and asked if she could make them more feminine looking. She looked at them and said they were already quite feminine for a man, so that's when I told her about Steve becoming Sheelagh. She instantly understood what I was saying. She did new drawings of the tattoos from the photos by adding flowers and brighter colours so I could take it back to Sheelagh to see what she thought of them.

I found it interesting when she said her brother was having problems coming to grips with being "different" and feeling like he was born in the wrong body. She said she worried about him because quite often he was suicidal. I think she needed someone to talk about it with, and I'm glad I could be that person for her. I also gave her two web sites she could pass along to her brother that I thought would be helpful. I thought he might feel better if he could connect with like minded transgendered people. Funny isn't it how when we look at people we think they are perfectly normal, living perfectly mundane lives, when in fact there are often a lot of things hidden behind closed doors. Needless to say Sheelagh loved the new tattoo ideas and had them completed the following month.

Thinking about GRS

Sheelagh turned fifty-six in 2013. She told me that she regretted waiting as long as she did to start transitioning. She knew that the surgeries she'd had were necessary, and had accepted the risks that were associated with each one. She had mentioned before that having genital reconstruction surgery (GRS) might be something she would need. This surgery can be part of the treatment for severe gender dysphoria. It would change her male genitals to female genitals. The procedure carries many high risks that range from loss of sensation to death. She knew that as she got older the chance of something going wrong in surgery got higher. And if it had to be done, it would be better to have it done sooner than later.

I wasn't going to accept the possibility of her dying to have this done. I had endured enough stress already with being involved in her FFS and breast

surgery. I sure as hell didn't need this as well. I wasn't interested at all in discussing this. As far as I was concerned the procedure was not happening.

From the very beginning of Sheelagh's transition I told her I would stay with her and support her but my "line in the sand" was - if she ever got GRS I told her I would leave. You have to remember I've always been heterosexual and the two of us were still enjoying somewhat of a sex life, but GRS would change all that.

I had no idea how to relate to a woman sexually and I didn't want to. I had married a man and I thought I'd been as understanding and supportive and loving as possible. I did not support this idea and she stopped talking about it. I hoped she stopped thinking about it as well. So what do we do when things have been tense and we want a break, we go shopping of course.

Syracuse

The next weekend we went over the border and went shopping at our favourite mall and ate at our favourite Italian restaurant. That night we made love and reconnected in a way that we hadn't in four months.

How could she think of getting GRS when everything was working? Sheelagh often would say that she felt we were in a sexless marriage. We tried quite often to have sex that would end happily for Sheelagh, unfortunately it didn't happen often enough. That weekend proved her wrong. Maybe now she would stop talking about GRS!

Southwest Tour

In September we took our yearly fall trip to Arizona. It may sound strange that we would travel to one of the least gay friendly states, but we never had a problem. Once in a while we'd get a few stares but nothing more than that. We selected our hotels carefully, usually looking for those which were TAG approved (staff was trained in LGBT diversity and sensitivity) .We

always ordered a king bed in hotels and we were treated the same as anyone else.

There was one time we felt really uncomfortable and it was in a town called Farmington. Driving in, the town looked like it had seen better years, and everywhere you looked were pickup trucks with gun racks on them. The people we encountered wore tractor caps and weren't all that enlightened. That night we had dinner in our room because we thought that was safer than going out in the dark. Out of all the places we saw that was the one where our intuition told us to lay low, so we did. We were out of there and on the road by 9:00 A.M. and on our way to Ouray, Colorado.

We stopped in Silverton to check out their tourist information centre. The man at the till probably hadn't seen many tall women, because he paid close attention to Sheelagh. She wondered if she was being monitored for shoplifting. We squashed a souvenir penny, got some drinks and gladly continued on with our journey through high mountain passes.

The weather was sunny and brisk when we arrived in Ouray, but we were too early to check in to our hotel. We had lunch and did some shopping on the town's main street, where we were received with a friendly welcome in each place.

Our hotel was located beside a rushing mountain river. After checking in we sat in the gardens in front of the main office. The woman innkeeper came out and talked with us. She told us of how she was drawn to the mountain town of Ouray, called the "Geneva of the Rockies", and how she had developed her inn. We shared stories of our life with her, and we felt very welcomed and accepted. After she went back inside we looked up at the cliff behind the hotel and spotted an LGBT rainbow flag high above, planted in the rock of the mountainside. The town was chilly that day, but our welcome was warm.

A Tuba Disappointment

The ride from Ouray to Sedona began with a dramatic drive through a steep canyon, over mountain passes and along a valley flanked by Rocky

Mountains as we entered Durango. Sheelagh filled the fuel tank and I went inside to pay - the standard way of refuelling. Sheelagh was worried about getting into a confrontation in case she was read (meaning someone didn't believe she was a woman). I have always been at ease dealing with strangers in retail situations, so it was no big deal. Sometimes I teased her about this arrangement, but that was only because I wished that she had more confidence to deal with people. I didn't understand why she thought she might be read, but I wanted to support her and lessen her anxiety when I could.

The road from there into Arizona travelled through lovely green forests, and then became flat and dry as we approached the four corners area. There is a monument located there that shows the point where the states of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Arizona meet. We stopped and explored the souvenir stalls that flanked the monument which was a large circular plaque in the centre of a plaza. First nations women were running the stalls, most of them being quite short and stout. Sheelagh attracted attention, likely because of her height and slenderness. The local delicacy, fried bread, was freely available. Sugared deep fried dough sounded like a treat, but Sheelagh wasn't interested. She said she couldn't be less tall but she could quickly become more stout.

After driving for an hour through a desiccated martian landscape of huge wind contoured red rocks we began to see large dust devils in the distance. By the time we reached Kyenta, we were in a full blown dust storm. We stopped to refill our fuel tank, because the next city was more than three hours away. Sheelagh filled the tank and I cleaned the windshield as the sand storm swirled around us. When I got back to the car Sheelagh was already inside and complaining about the windward side of her face being sore. I was more concerned about getting the sand out of my mouth and off of my lipstick.

We continued toward Monument Valley park, wowed by the sight of the enormous stone monoliths that seemed so near to the road. We followed closely behind the vehicle in front of us which helped us stay on the right side of the highway. The road disappeared then reappeared with coils of sinuous dusty sand weaving over it. The drive was tiring so we pulled into

the parking lot of a building that seemed to be an information centre for Monument Valley.

The inside of the building was faced with large rustic wooden beams. We wandered around for a few minutes to find out what we needed to do to get access to the park. A stocky tribal man addressed us with a slyly friendly question.

“Are you ladies lost?” he asked.

We soon found out that nature had just brought heavy rains, unusual at this time of year, and that the park roads were not safe to drive. We’d discovered the day before that the rented Jeep we’d been driving was only equipped with two wheel drive. Therefore we wouldn’t be able to get any closer to Monument Valley on this trip, which was a huge disappointment.

After many hours of driving through dry desolate land, we tiredly entered the town of Tuba City. The city stood on arid Navajo land, on the border of the Hopi reservation. The homes looked impoverished, but tidy. The shops we planned to visit were out of business. The commercial centre was an intersection neatly surrounded by gas stations, two hotels, a Denny’s and a McDonald’s. Our hotel was there, and we found a parking spot. The hotel was clean but the staff were surly. The nicest part was getting to take a shower to get the sand off of ourselves from the storm. After having a boring meal at Denny’s we fell into bed happy to be out of the elements.

The Fall

After spending the first week travelling we looked forward to staying in a house in Sedona for the following week. When we arrived in Sedona we headed to the Barking Frog for lunch. It was nice to sit and relax over good food and a glass of wine until it was time for us to pick up the keys to our house. This house was approximately fifteen minutes out of town in the desert. We found the place and got settled in and then went back to town for some supplies and dinner. We had a lovely evening complete with more wine and went to bed.

This was a two story house with the bedrooms upstairs. It had a strange floor plan because the washroom was around the corner off the bedroom after you went past the washer and dryer and through a glass door. This is important to mention because during the night Sheelagh got up to use the washroom and went through the door beside the bed (which took her out into the upstairs hallway) and she walked until her foot went into an unexpected inset step throwing her off balance and over the railing, where she landed on a mat on a concrete floor. As she was falling headfirst her head struck a ledge on the wall throwing her counter clockwise and thereby hitting the concrete floor feet first which probably saved her life.

I was sound asleep through all of this until I heard Sheelagh yelling in pain, I ran downstairs and was horrified to see her lying on the floor in agony, surrounded by shards of broken pottery. I knew not to move her and the first thing I wanted to do was call 911 because I thought for sure she had to have broken her legs, or hip or something, but she said no. She tentatively tried moving her feet and her hands and found that she could. She wanted me to help her up and over to the couch. Again I said I thought I should call an ambulance and she said no – to just help her up. Against my better judgment I did and she walked to the couch and sat down. She looked white as a sheet and was in a great deal of pain. She sat there a while coming to grips with what had happened ,I asked her if I could drive her to the hospital and again she said no. I thought she should go but I couldn't force her, so I asked if she thought she could walk up to the bedroom with my help.

She said she could, so we very slowly went up the very long flight of stairs and she gently lay down on the bed. She took some pain medication and just laid there. I thought if she went into shock it would be better to be lying down with covers on rather than sitting downstairs. She kept talking about what had happened over and over again. I think it was helping her to process what had happened.

Sheelagh finally told me why she didn't want to go to the hospital. It was because her lower parts did not match her upper parts and she didn't want to deal with people poking and prodding her and possibly treating her differently because she was a transwoman. She was more afraid of

something being done to her in the hospital than she was of the pain from the fall. We spent the next few hours chatting off and on and then she fell asleep for a little while. I laid there watching her, thinking she could have died. If she had hit her head first she surely would have. She could have broken her spine and been left paralyzed – so many awful possibilities, but here she was still in one piece. Her guardian angel was definitely watching over her.

The next day she very slowly made her way down the stairs. She had sustained a tremendous amount of bruising, mostly on her right side. Her right eye socket and cheek were swollen and bruised and her right wrist and hand were badly swollen. Both ankles were so bruised they were almost black. She didn't want to move very much because she felt her back had been wrenched.

Sheelagh felt awful, she felt like she had been cursed and felt the darkness inside and the pain she felt in her body flash from time to time. During this time we were both very worried that the right cheek implant may have separated from the bone near her eye. You could feel the edge of the implant with your finger. At that point Sheelagh was very worried because she did not know how she was going to get home or how she was going to get her face repaired.

One of the many interesting things about Sheelagh is she has an amazing ability to heal. During the following forty-eight hours the bruising changed to purple and then yellow, and the edge of the cheek implant could no longer be felt. Since she survived this unexpected brush with death, she felt that she was saved in order to fulfill some purpose that she sought but could not yet see. The clouds of depression that were brought on by the pain and the loss of a happy holiday were reduced by her recognition that she was on this earth to do something. Knowing there was something she had been saved to do helped her rise above feeling like a puppet of the universe. A moment of clarity inspired her to seek help in order to reorganize her life so that her life with me would be happier and more fulfilling. She resolved that she wouldn't be overcome by the difficulties of her painful situation, her stress at work, or her nightly nightmares.

My heart hurt so badly for her because all of our plans for our time in Sedona were over before they got started. She couldn't go hiking or sit out and eat in a restaurant. She could not stand the movement of the car against her body, because the pain was too intense. During the six days we had left in our holiday she only had the strength and want to venture out twice to do a little shopping. I spent the week going into town for supplies when we needed them and looking after Sheelagh. Not much of a holiday for either of us but at least Sheelagh was still alive. We flew home on Saturday and poor Sheelagh was so stiff and sore sitting still for over four hours. When the plane landed we had never been so happy to be back.

Sheelagh went to the emergency room the next day and was told by the doctor there to eat fresh pineapple because it would help to clear up bruising. That was it, after waiting five hours in Emergency. Unbelievable. On Monday she went to her personal doctor who prescribed some strong pain medication and set her up for a CAT scan. The results of that CAT scan showed five damaged vertebra in the middle and lower part of the back. She was off work for a week. After returning to work she found she could only work part days. The medication was lessening the pain but it felt like no healing was taking place.

Loss of Elmo

After being back home for nearly three weeks our little dog Elmo was eaten by a coyote – I should say this was really Sheelagh's dog and his death affected her greatly. The sadness of that loss elicited bouts of crying that she hadn't experienced for many years. She felt like she was going to be overcome by the losses in her life and that's when she hit a depression so deep she wanted to die. Sheelagh went to her doctor and got her depression medication tripled, and took a few weeks off work; the pain was too much, the stress at work was too much and the sadness of losing Elmo was too much.

Time continued and carried us along in its wake and we both felt such emptiness in the house without Elmo. We began to discuss getting another dog to keep Holly company and fill the void we were feeling. Was that a

really good idea considering all of the circumstances leading us up to this point? Probably not, but hindsight is always 20/20.

Tractor Wrestling

The month of November snuck up on us, and since we lived out in the country we plowed our own driveway. Every fall we have a ritual where we have to take the grass cutter off the John Deere tractor and replace it with the snow blower. This is not an easy task at the best of times and now the two of us were going to do it. Sheelagh had lost some muscle mass due to the transition and was suffering from pain from her fall in Sedona. I honestly had no idea how we were going to lift and move huge pieces of metal.

Let's just say she's as smart as she is cute because she bought a winch and with the help of WD 40 to loosen some bolts, we used the winch and we were able to get the cutter out and up and on the wall out of the way. In order to get the blower on she used leverage instead of brute force and it worked. The whole procedure took a little longer than it once did but we did it and I not only felt relieved but proud as well. I seriously doubted we could do it – but we did! The nice thing was the snow held off for a few more weeks.

Shay

On Sunday, November 24 2013 we went and picked up the new addition to our family. We had a little male Havanese puppy by the name of Shay. This little guy brought out all of Sheelagh's mothering instincts. She had always been nice and kind to our dogs but this time she treated him like a baby. Having a new puppy in the house is like having a new baby; they need lots of attention and don't sleep through the night.

After two weeks it was becoming increasingly apparent that our new puppy Shay was not going to be a crate puppy. He made ungodly noises when left alone. Sheelagh said we could bring him up to our bedroom and he wouldn't be alone and then he'd stop crying – she was right. Shay had his

bed beside Sheelagh and was the perfect puppy. It only took him about four weeks to make it up onto the bed, but he stayed on Sheelagh's side and that worked for me.

Breast Problems

In late November, Sheelagh had been having burning pains in her right breast that were waking her up at night. She had a feeling there was a problem with the surgery because not only was the pocket wrong in the bottom, it was far too large at the top. If she bent over to tie her shoe the implants would move up to her collarbone. She sent some pictures to the office to illustrate the problem. She explained to them that the right breast was painful and didn't look right. Sheelagh spoke with the doctor`s assistant by phone and was told the problem could be fixed with a relatively short surgery.

Sheelagh spent hours on the computer researching her problem and wrote to them again in early January to tell them it would require more extensive surgery to fix the problem. Now Sheelagh felt the left breast was being affected as well. She was told she had to go to their office and see the doctor. She set up a visit scheduled for February 5, 2014.

Scottsdale

Sheelagh surprised me by saying she felt badly that our time in Sedona was ruined because of her fall, so she wanted to go to Scottsdale over Christmas to make up for it. I jumped at the idea because the thought of being somewhere warm in December sounded wonderful! I knew going through airport security was extremely stressful on Sheelagh. The possibility of being singled out for having an unusual shape for a woman was always there, so it meant a lot to me that she'd go through that again so soon.

We actually breezed through security and had a wonderful time in Scottsdale. I still missed that feeling of solidarity when we used to go out holding hands, but knowing she almost died, I felt good just to be able to be with her. We definitely showed no public displays of affection, but our

private displays were pretty good. We went shopping, ate out all the time, and made love.

Neither one of us wanted to go back home after a week, but responsibility called and we had to return to Canada. The puppies were thrilled to have us back and again we faced another New Year's Eve together. I was glad 2013 was over because I wanted to start a new and happy year with my wife Sheelagh.

CHAPTER FOUR
2014

A new year and a lot of snow. We ended up getting so much snow in January that our stand by “snowplow guy” couldn’t make it up our driveway. The snow was so deep we had to bring in a front end loader to remove it. Between the freezing rain and snow it was just crazy! I know Sheelagh was happy she didn’t have to clear it out.

My plans for my work life had come to a stand still. I found that I could no longer do my stained glass work due to the swollen joints in my hands and elbows. I was on a waiting list to see a rheumatologist and then hopefully I would have a solution to whatever was causing me so much pain.

Breasts Again

As I had mentioned before, Sheelagh had been having problems with her right breast implant. It had somehow fallen out of the pocket it was supposed to be in and was shifting out of place heading towards her right armpit and down towards her ribcage. It was painful and awkward for her and she was feeling worried that the other one was doing the same thing. Pain was being caused every day because something had come apart that shouldn’t have come apart. It was continuing to tear due to the weight of the implant pressing down on the tear.

She had contacted the doctor who had done the procedure, and now the time had come when she would have to travel down there and see her. Poor Sheelagh, on a horrible snowy day she flew to an airport near New York city, rented a car and drove to the doctor’s office in freezing rain. The

doctor basically spent less than ten minutes with her and said she'd fix it with a few stitches for free, but Sheelagh would have to pay for the hospital time and the anesthesiologist, as well as the travel and accommodation involved.

When Sheelagh finally made it home at 3:00 A.M. the next morning she was one exhausted, frustrated person. After a good sleep she was extremely unhappy with the doctor's offer and after doing more research she believed she had a fairly rare complication called bottoming-out. This basically meant that the breast implant was breaking out of the pocket that was made for it during surgery. A common estimate for repairing this is usually a two to three hour operation. It was apparent to her that a few stitches and half an hour of surgery was not going to fix the problem.

A few days later she contacted the office because she needed answers to questions she still didn't have answers to. She was told that the doctor had left for a conference and would be away for a few weeks. That's when Sheelagh asked to have a time arranged when she could talk to the doctor privately and asked that she be contacted on her cell phone. When the doctor did return she called Sheelagh at her workplace, on her landline without warning. Sheelagh obviously wasn't able to talk about such private matters at work within earshot of her coworkers.

The doctor gave Sheelagh the same song and dance about how she could book the operation through the office and how only one breast needed work. That was all she had to say and after that she hung up on Sheelagh. At this point Sheelagh knew she could not trust this doctor, not only due to the fact she wasn't communicating well, but that she thought her quick fix was the only answer. Sheelagh felt she had reached a dead end.

After that experience we spent hours and days researching other doctors who could correct this complex problem. There were many, many doctors who do plastic surgery but very few who could do capsulorrhaphy well. We narrowed it down to four, but I suggested Dr. K (the doctor who did her FFS), and Sheelagh contacted their office and sent them photos of the problem. After that Dr. K contacted Sheelagh by phone and they had a great discussion. He said the implants were too small, too high and recognized

that something had to be done to reinforce the pockets so they wouldn't continue to tear. Dr. K said he wanted to wait until as much time as possible had passed from the time of the original surgery because there was some kind of capsule or something that thickens with time and he had to suture that in order to repair the damage.

They agreed to do the surgery in September so that everything could heal as well as possible. The capsule that forms around the implant needed time to become thick enough in order to hold the stitches that would be needed to support the new implants. The cost of this surgery would be seven thousand dollars American, and the surgery would last approximately four hours for the breast repair and augmentation. A stay of only three days would be required for recuperation.

CAMH

Back in 2012, Sheelagh had contacted CAMH to find out why she hadn't received a response from them about the referral that had been sent to them in 2011. They said that a referral was received by them but they had been waiting for a completed questionnaire form to be filled in. This was odd since a multi-page report showing a diagnosis of gender dysphoria from early 2011 had been included with the referral, so Sheelagh assumed that the report had answered those questions thereby sending the questionnaire in would be redundant. Assuming this was just bureaucratic idiocy she completed the questionnaire anyway and sent it to them.

Several weeks later she was given an appointment date, one and a half years in the future. That date was July 2015! Sheelagh contacted CAMH early in 2014 after discovering that they now had a social worker on the gender identity team. She wrote to the social worker outlining all the facts and obtained an earlier date.

Therefore on March 23rd, I found myself dropping Sheelagh off at the train station for her trip to Toronto for her intake interviews at the Gender Identity clinic at The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). The purpose of an intake interview was to determine whether treatment was

needed for gender dysphoria, and whether it was suitable for the clinic to provide it.

She took all the material to support the completion of her Real Life Experience (RLE) period, which is required to be one year. This meant living her life as a woman continuously for twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. RLE is a requirement for bottom surgery, according to the WPATH Standards of Care. By now it was over three years.

A psychiatrist and a psychologist interviewed her. In Sheelagh's interview with the psychiatrist she mentioned that there was a part in the diagnostic report in her file that would have more details about the questions she was being asked. The psychiatrist opened the file and only found a prescription which said, "Please see this patient for transgenderism."

Her family doctor had either not sent the documentation, or it had been lost at CAMH. A multi-page formal application was required and had been completed to request the referral. The detailed diagnostic report that had been prepared by the psychologist that Sheelagh had worked with was also missing. Now Sheelagh realized why she sitting at this interview more than two years later than she expected it would have happened.

More than a month later she still had not heard back from the clinic so Sheelagh went to her local doctor to see if he'd received anything, which he had. He had received a written report from both the interviewers. Possibly he just assumed that Sheelagh would have been informed of the results as well, and therefore had not contacted her. The reports both confirmed the diagnosis of gender dysphoria and recommended that an interview to determine her readiness for GRS be scheduled as soon as possible. Her doctor wasn't going to do anything with regards to this, so Sheelagh took it upon herself and badgered CAMH until she had her date for the final interviews. She got a date a few weeks later for May 23rd.

At that time she was again interviewed by two other mental health professionals to determine whether she fully understood the procedure, its ramifications, and whether she had a post surgery support plan. When the

interviews were over she left feeling positive that she would receive funding for GRS.

Key West

One of the many interesting things we did this year was go to Key West for a week's holiday. I thought this would be a great place to visit since we had always heard it was gay friendly and a haven for artists. We stayed at a B&B that advertised as LGBT friendly. It was on Duval Street far enough away from the craziness, but unfortunately too far away from most things of interest. Sheelagh was expecting to experience a place that was tolerant, open and accepting of people of diverse lifestyles and genders. The B&B advertised that they supported the concept of "one human family". This is the motto of Key West which basically means the equality of all, and specifically condemns every illusion that separates people from being equal.

When we arrived at our B&B Sheelagh felt slighted by the innkeeper – Sheelagh was sitting directly in front of the innkeeper but she chose to ignore Sheelagh and spoke only to me. The innkeeper's body language was not welcoming. It was an unfortunate way to begin our trip but it pretty much set the tone for most of the week. I asked Sheelagh what the highlights and lowlights of the trip to Key West were for her. She flippantly said her favourite thing was getting on the plane and leaving. I thought that was a little harsh so when I asked her again she amended it by saying, she loved us making out in our little cottage and it was all about connection and feeling at home with each other in a faraway place. I loved that because that was identical to my feelings with regards to her.

Sometimes I think it also could be feelings of "me and her against the world" because for the most part we don't fit in. Even when we joined up for two different bar crawls we thought there would be a cross section of people and we would meet some new friends, but the crawls just made Sheelagh feel more alienated. She said Key West was not a gay and lesbian haven as advertised, but a place catering mostly to gay men. With all the bars and readily accessible alcohol, we were disappointed to find the place also catered a great deal to straight baby boomers versus gay women.

It wasn't even a comfortable place to walk hand in hand because of the dirty or questioning looks we received from the tourists around us. The one exception we found was when one night we were returning home after one of the crawls and we were holding hands and a fellow stopped us and asked if he could take our picture – I asked, "Why?"

He said, "Because you just look happy."

What we didn't say was that we'd made love the day before, and it was good. We were still living in the afterglow. No matter how snooty the tourists were, we couldn't stop our happiness from shining through.

This was something that made Sheelagh very happy because she loved walking down the street holding hands and she was thrilled I wasn't feeling afraid or ashamed to do it. I believe everyone should be able to walk anywhere holding hands with the one they love, but society can be a scary, non-accepting place. I worry a lot about being harassed or hurt by people who hate gays. I know - I worry a lot! That night I think the drinks I had earlier helped to limit my inhibitions and I just needed to feel the closeness with Sheelagh, so I reached for her hand which she happily took in hers. It took a bit of courage for me, but it was fun and worth it.

During daylight hours people from the big tourist ships and people riding their Harley motorbikes were not there because the place was gay friendly. They were there because it was the southernmost part of the USA where they could go and encounter an entire street of bars that are open to the street. We came away from that trip thinking the entertainment was substandard, the drinks were substandard, and everything else was overpriced and underwhelming. It was the first vacation when we were actually counting down the days until we could leave and go back home.

After reaching home, Sheelagh was quick to write a review of her negative feelings about her treatment by the management at the B&B. The owner responded that everyone else seemed to have no problem. Sheelagh wrote back that she observed that the great majority of their clientele were straight or gay male couples. She also said that if the B&B owners didn't accept all

people then the owners should stop advertising their support for the “One Human Family” proclamation on their web site. Since then, they have removed their statement of support for the city’s motto.

Summer

On the 14th of June my son, Michael, and his new fiancée came by for a visit. They live in Alberta so it was a big deal for them to travel the two thousand plus miles to where we lived. This was the first time they had met Sheelagh (they had known about her transition, but had yet to meet the new and improved Sheelagh), they were both great, very accepting and loving. I thought Michael who had known Sheelagh as Steve for almost half his life might have a little reticence, but no, we all had a lovely afternoon and it was sad to see them leave.

Life has a way of continuing and it was hard to believe that a year had passed since the death of my mom. We bought a red maple tree and planted it out front to commemorate the date. Sheelagh was so sweet, she sweated bullets digging a hole big enough and fertilizing it within an inch of it’s life. Our fingers were crossed that it would survive the winter and grow into a beautiful remembrance tree. We hoped it would be as hardy as the woman it memorialized. The next spring it came vigorously back to life.

On June 25th, Sheelagh found out the results of the interviews she’d had at CAMH. She had passed everything and had been recommended for surgery in Montreal. Sex had only worked for her once in the last nine months, so for her, the announcement gave her hope that things could be better. For me, however, this announcement made the possibility of GRS more real, and this reality stung. I just wasn’t going to think about it, because if I did I’d go crazy.

Anniversary 15

The celebration of our fifteenth wedding anniversary was quickly approaching. Fifteen was a big number for both of us. We had both been married before, but the fifteenth anniversary in those marriages was not a

happy time. At those times, fifteen was the herald of the impending death of severely failing relationships.

For us this was a time of renewal, and we felt that it was a time to commemorate not just the good times we'd had, but to celebrate the escape from what was nearly the end of our marriage. Most marriages do not survive the process or consideration of the trial of transsexual transition. We felt we'd left the dark days of that threat behind us.

How we would celebrate it required discussion. We'd committed ourselves to a large expense for our trip to see the Rolling Stones in New Zealand. Money wasn't exactly tight, but we were aware that starting a trend of extravagance could lead to being unable to be ready for the big trip. We wanted to return to the hotel beside the Kingston harbour, and drink wine while listening to the festivities of the annual Busker's festival. We also imagined having a lazy afternoon sipping exotic cocktails in a Queen street bistro we had been to before, but we knew the bill for that holiday would be more than a thousand dollars.

So instead of that we went out and bought our favourite cheeses, wines and nibbles so we could have our own celebratory feast in our home in the forest. We could spend more freely on our frugal festival, because compared to Kingston it would be a bargain. It wasn't all we wanted, but it was all we needed to enjoy the weekend with each other and in each other's embrace.

Our anniversary date fell on a Saturday so we we able to go out for breakfast together. At a small cafe in a nearby town we ordered a simple breakfast. While we ate, Sheelagh presented me with a little box. I looked at her questioningly and opened it slowly. I was surprised to find a necklace with an entwined diamond heart pendant. My heart was touched that she would remember how special a double heart was to me. One heart was one person, a double heart meant two, and that was me and my Sheelagh.

We went back home to celebrate, and that afternoon we had nibbles and a cocktail on our sunny deck. Sheelagh went inside and a few minutes later, I heard her call to me from upstairs. What could she want? I thought she was

coming right back out, so I went to find out what the problem was. I trudged up the stairs, down the hallway and pushed open the bedroom door which was ajar. Just as I did, I was grabbed from behind, and found myself pinned against the wall by her body. I was startled and pleasantly surprised to feel her soft lips press passionately to mine. I closed my eyes and melted into her firm embrace. Where was this going? I didn't care as I felt the heat of love between us rise in our hearts.

She kissed me deeply and I returned her kiss with ardor from my own depths. We were quickly on the bed, and both consumed in desire. Our passion took both of us to the heights we longed for, and we collapsed spent and fulfilled on the rumpled sheets.

We enjoyed the rest of this fantastic weekend together, reminiscing and talking about the next fifteen years. There was love for each other, in our hearts, our souls, and our bodies. It was a celebration of what was, as well as what was going to be.

Arthritis

It was around this time that I finally had my meeting with a rheumatologist and I was diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA). This is an autoimmune disease in which the body's immune system - which normally protects its health by attacking foreign substances like bacteria and viruses - mistakenly attacks the joints.

There isn't a cure for it, basically you try to slow the progression of the disease with drugs, diet, and exercise. Being told I had RA just threw me for a loop. With everything else that I had been dealing with I now had an incurable disease. Sheelagh was worried for me and totally supported the changes I made, including no red meat, sugar or coffee. After I got over the shock of it, I accepted it and altered my lifestyle accordingly. Everything was going to be alright .

Breast Augmentation Revision

Sheelagh's second breast augmentation surgery was just around the corner and we would be driving to Chicago.

I wondered what our stay at the Staybridge Inn would be like, and a week later I found out. Except for the front desk staff none of the other staff seemed to speak English and were not interested in talking with us. The surgery went well and Sheelagh was up and walking to breakfast the next day. Our time there went by fairly quickly – it was nice to have our own car. I was able to take her out for rides and we went and saw the marble Baha'i temple and Lake Michigan. She wasn't up to walking around very much but she did enjoy getting out of the hotel room for a break. By day five we were heading back home.

Unfortunately I had to drive the entire way back. The highways in Illinois were under construction, Indiana was under construction and Michigan had some of the worst bumpiest roads we had ever been on, and should have been under construction. Poor Sheelagh had a great deal of discomfort due to all the bumping and bouncing we had to endure.

We arrived home on a Monday and Sheelagh had to be back to work on Tuesday, and she figured she would be just fine. She still had to take pain medication and was expected to work a regular eight hour day. The first two days back she was so exhausted that three times she almost drove off the 401 on the way home, and once almost didn't make the corner coming into our driveway. She wasn't in a position where she could only work half days, so for a week I drove her to work and went back and picked her up eight hours later. It took one hour there and one hour back in the morning– then another hour there and another hour back in the afternoon. I lost four hours out of my day.

I was working for myself but by the time I looked after the dogs, the chores and groceries there weren't many hours left in the day. I was able to help her out for one week and by then she was able to taper off the medication and was feeling more awake behind the wheel. Thank goodness!

Sheelagh ended up being very happy with the results of the surgery. To this day she has not experienced any pain and can wear a bra without underwire.

That whole first experience was scary and caused the loss of a huge amount of money (approximately twenty thousand dollars Canadian). It was a damn shame she hadn't gone with Dr. Z in the first place.

It took until September 2014 to fix the unhappy outcome of the operation that began back in June of 2013. Throughout this time I felt bad for Sheelagh and tried to be supportive. I really hadn't wanted her to go for this surgery in the first place so at times I found myself feeling angry and frustrated with her. This transition was affecting our lives a great deal more than I ever could have imagined.

Ladies Night

A few weeks later our local Home Depot was having "A Ladies Night" and Sheelagh said we should go. They would be having some workshops and free food as well as surprise draws, so I said sure even though I did not want to go. We showed up with about sixty other women and were underwhelmed. The roses we were given upon entering were a nice touch, but we thought the workshops would be places where we would learn something, and actually do it, and then take home a finished product. That was not the case. They had someone talking about how to plant bulbs, someone else talking about how to caulk things, and someone else from LG wanting to sell washers and dryers.

Sheelagh felt uncomfortable because she was the tallest person there and already knew everything they were teaching, and I was bored because I didn't care about the things they were talking about. We put in a good forty-five minutes and then called it a night. The best part of the evening was when we got to eat Home Depot's cake! (Just a little bit of sugar!).

GRS Reconsidered

We were watching television on the night before Hallowe'en when Sheelagh's mobile phone buzzed. She reached over lazily to check it. The message was from the Montreal Clinic - last August they had booked her

for GRS on March 10th in 2015. Her eyes widened as she mouthed an expletive.

“What is it?” I asked.
“They’ve changed the friggin’ date!” she exclaimed.

The date change was a minor one, just one day, from the 10th to the 9th, but the 9th was a Monday. Since the failure of her initial breast surgery, which took place on a Monday, she swore she would never ever have another surgery on a Monday. She responded quickly to Montreal telling them that the date wasn’t acceptable. The email exchange continued over the next couple of days.

At the end of it, she had lost her confirmed surgery date, and had now completely decided against having GRS in Montreal. She was beginning to question whether to have GRS at all. This huge disruption of plans that had been in place for months seemed to her to be an omen that her decision for GRS may have been a wrong one. Sex still wasn’t working for her, and hadn’t in months, so she still believed something had to change - but what?

She began to explore information on all the other GRS surgeons that she had identified as prime candidates back in March after she’d had her intake interview at CAMH. She was also trying to figure out how surgery in a foreign country could be financed. Some surgeons in Thailand would be available in early 2015, and with a stretch she could probably finance it herself. The prime US surgeons might be available as well, but their wait list was much longer than the Thai doctors. Orchiectomy (removal of the testes) might still be an option, since that would allow her to stop taking the strong anti-androgen medication that threatened the health of her liver.

New Zealand

This was our time for living outside the box – we were going on a two week trip – one week in New Zealand and one week in Maui. We were going to New Zealand to see the Rolling Stones! That is the only reason. I’m sure to some it sounds elitist and others may have thought we were crazy but to us it made perfect sense. I was worried about my future of living with

rheumatoid arthritis and Sheelagh was also worried about me, on top of that she was worrying about whether to get GRS and the effect it would have on our relationship.

Therefore we thought we would throw caution to the wind and do a once in a lifetime trip. It was between Perth, Australia and Auckland New Zealand, those being the two places the Stones were playing that we could get to. Sheelagh picked New Zealand because their attitude to gays was more favourable than that of Australia. We bought the Stones tickets online and I spent three hours in a CAA travel office working out times, flights and hotels with our travel agent. I had no idea we would be flying through six different airports in fourteen days. It is a hell of a long ways to go to New Zealand… Who knew?!

The day finally came when we dropped our puppies off at their kennel and we were off. First stop was Toronto and then on to Los Angeles. Thank goodness Air New Zealand had an amazing lounge because we landed there at 11:15 A.M. and didn't depart until 11:00 P.M. that night. It was a pretty good day because we had comfy seats, free Wi-Fi, free food and alcoholic drinks. The time passed relatively quickly and then we got to board Air New Zealand to fly to Auckland. The plane was lovely, we had great seats and I took a sleeping pill and woke up six hours later with only five more hours left to fly. Sheelagh got in some sleep as well and we arrived in Auckland at 8:30 the next morning.

We retrieved our luggage, grabbed a taxi and went off to our hotel down by the Viaduct. It was exciting to be in a place I'd only ever seen on a map. The hotel was beautiful, overlooking the Harbour and we ended up on the top floor with a balcony over the water. As far as I was concerned we had the best room in the place. We felt quite comfortable in Auckland – a lot of the people were tall, so Sheelagh felt like she belonged and a lot of people had red hair, so I fit right in. Put that together with being in a gay friendly country and we were thrilled.

We found the Auckland train station. It was as big as Union Station, but not as pretty. The people who worked there were lovely and extremely helpful. We took a train to Sylvia Park and walked around and admired the

Christmas decorations and the different types of stores they had in the malI. It's always intriguing to see what people in other countries like to buy versus what we like. We bought some souvenirs and enjoyed the train trip back to downtown Auckland.

We poked around city streets and found a liquor store so we could have wine that night without paying two arms and a leg for it. On Saturday we were so excited - it was concert day! We took the train to Smart Stadium and found out we had tickets six rows up from the stage and right on the aisle. Best seats ever!

There were forty thousand people there that night and it was easy to get caught up in the atmosphere of excitement. It was a monumental, once in a lifetime event complete with fireworks. There was a little bit of rain but that didn't spoil the night. The concert was everything we hoped it would be. Unfortunately when it was over all those people had to leave either by train or bus because cars were not allowed there. We thought it would be a logistics nightmare getting out of there by train, but we were some of the first people out and even got a seat on one of the first train cars.

We left the station and walked back to the hotel at midnight along the waterfront and felt totally safe and happy.We both had an absolutely fantastic night!

The next day we slept in and walked around the Victoria Market and bought some jade jewelry. After that we walked up a mountain to Ponsonby. It was a quaint little town with cute shops and a bookstore with plywood as the floor. After a drink and a rest we took a taxi down and back to our hotel.

After catching our breath we decided to head east to see what we could discover and we found a grocery store called "One World". We love grocery stores in different countries because you get to see all the different types of food other people eat. The most bizarre thing happened when we were there shopping, we heard someone say, " Hiya! Hiya Sheelagh!" Turning around we saw Gus coming towards us, he was the steward who looked after our section on the flight to New Zealand. What are the chances we would run into the only Brazilian Kiwi who knew Sheelagh by name in

a grocery store fourteen thousand kilometres from home. It was a hoot! We bought some nibbles and on our way back we came across a huge green space and discovered it was Victoria Park.

We found a bench below rows of mature trees and sat close together in the shifting light provided by the swaying branches above us. After the long walk from the grocery store we were hungry and started looking for something to munch on from our grocery bags. Peeking in the bag we discovered two gaily wrapped Santas-on-sticks. We'd found our prize! We ate our chocolate-covered marshmallow Santas while we watched a cricket game, a yoga class, people boxing, as well as people practicing bagpipes. Definitely quite the experience for us while relaxing after the Rolling Stones concert the night before.

We had transported ourselves to this far away place, and the sounds and the sights of the day were transporting us to a new and warm place within ourselves. We strolled back to our hotel holding our happiness for this place and each other, close to our hearts.

We laughed as we fiddled with the controls of the elevator we had to use to get back to our room. The antics needed to swipe cards, push buttons and balance bags amused us and had quickly become a familiar ritual of entry to our seaside hideaway. Our room was close to the elevator and we quickly reached the door and swiped our card again. Home at last! We put our bags on the little table by the door and threw ourselves happily on the king bed overlooking the harbour. Sheelagh rolled towards me, put her arm around my waist, and drew me towards her with a happy glint of desire in her eyes.

The warmth we brought to our room was inflamed by the way she looked at me, and my heart was happy that we were there together. I reached for her shoulder and drew her towards me, and our lips met. The heat of our bodies matched that of the Auckland sun that streamed through the huge windows beside the bed, illuminating our bodies. We could see the world, but it could not see us. Far above the city, our bodies met, our passion flared, and we were carried away to a magical place.This was even better than the fireworks that ended the Stones concert the night before!

Auckland was a lovely city and the people we met there were the nicest most polite people we have ever met. We thought Canadians were nice but the Kiwis definitely have us beat. Sheelagh was going to miss her flat white coffees but planned on telling people back home how good they were so she could have them at her local cafe.

We had reached the day when it was time to leave and fly to Hawaii, another place we both wanted to visit but had never been to. We were amused by the flight status signs at the airport. In true Kiwi style instead of using the word “Delayed” to indicate a delayed flight, on the sign they used the word “Relax”. We loved it!

Hawaii

It was dark as we flew over Fiji on the way to Honolulu airport where we witnessed a constellation of lights from the nearby city. After an hour of standing in line at immigration we had to wait until the next day to fly to Maui because there were no other flights available that night. We spent the night, at a nearby hotel and were introduced to the friendliness and charm of the Hawaiian people. The next morning we had a sumptuous breakfast and then flew out to Maui that afternoon.

We were met at the airport by a limousine service and were presented with fresh floral leis. They scooped up our luggage for us and guided us to their car. We left without delay and drove past field after field of sugar cane until we arrived at our hotel in Wailea. We were in awe at the sight of this gorgeous hotel that was even more grand than the one we had left in Auckland. We felt it was obvious we were two women travelling together and we were treated exactly the same if not better than everyone else. We had a room on the top floor of building Hana Seven overlooking the South Pacific ocean.

We had an exquisite time beginning with cocktails and lunch by the pool as the palm trees swayed in the warm trade winds, and the sweet perfume of tropical flowers wafted around us. As far as I was concerned I was in heaven. I had found my favourite place and I was there with my favourite person in the whole wide world.

I couldn’t imagine being there with anyone other than Sheelagh, and it didn’t matter to me that my spouse was a woman. I’d reached a point within myself where I was becoming more comfortable in the world with my wife.

We swam in the infinity pool, jumped waves in the Pacific ocean and went shopping at the Wailea shops. We attended a luau which was fun because it was new and culturally different, but we didn’t enjoy the people at our table. For the most part it was a family who had other members of their family at the next table so it was annoying that they kept going back and forth talking during the dinner performance.

The next day Sheelagh and I rented a jeep for the day to explore the west side of the island. We made our way through Kihai and up to Lahaina and spent some time looking in stores and the odd gallery. All the people we encountered were friendly and cheerful. We enjoyed our day out but it was wonderful to head back to our little bit of heaven in Wailea. We enjoyed many happy hours there, ate amazing food, and needless to say we never wanted to leave for home.

Sheelagh and I felt very welcomed and comfortable at the resort and all the staff we met were extremely friendly and talkative. We will definitely be returning in the future.

When it was time to leave we had to go to the Maui airport, then to Honolulu airport, then to Vancouver and then finally home to Toronto. It really was exhausting due to all the wait times and security checks. We walked into our house after midnight and fell into bed, happy to be home safe and sound.

Return to Home

At this point things were going well at work for Sheelagh and I was feeling well. It was nice to be home, but also exciting to know that we would be leaving soon for Scottsdale. It was at this time I received a message saying that our breeder was looking for a home for one of her stud dogs. It seemed that Harley (our puppy’s father) was being put out to pasture. I loved

Harley, he was a beautiful Havanese with a great disposition. I asked Sheelagh if we could give him a home. We talked about him and us, and she said that as long as we were good as a couple and were going to stay together forever we could get him. I wasn't planning on leaving, and I knew she wasn't, so I contacted the kennel.

I quickly discovered that Harley had never been leash trained or house trained or neutered (obviously), that's when I knew he wasn't the dog for us. That decision not to get him was a sad one, but I looked at another kennel and they had recently had a litter of Havanese puppies. I asked the breeder to send us a photo of the male puppies in the litter, because we were after a male to go along with Shay. She sent us pictures of two little guys and we fell in love with the look of them. It's funny, we were beyond having children, but having a puppy felt like it was cementing our relationship and it felt right.

An Unexpected Change

After returning home, I wanted to see Sissy because I'd been gone for awhile and she was about to leave for Florida for three months. Having her come up would give us an opportunity to catch up on everything before we all went our separate ways for Christmas. I asked Sheelagh if she was okay with the visit and she said she was. I told her that Sissy planned to come up from Thursday to Saturday. Sheelagh didn't like that we wouldn't have Friday night alone together, but was okay with the plan. On Friday evening, after Sissy spoke with her husband on the phone.

She had a favour to ask and said, "Peeter said picking me up on Sunday would be more convenient for him. Would you mind if I stayed another day, and leave on Sunday morning?"

Sheelagh went silent and looked away. She was my sister, what could I say? I was caught between a rock and a hard place. "No problem Sissy! You're welcome to stay," I said.

After those words were out of my mouth Sheelagh got up and walked out of the room. I wasn't aware of how much having time alone together meant to

her. I went and spoke with her and reassured her that Sissy would leave on Sunday morning and we would have the afternoon together. As it turned out, Sissy did not leave until later on Sunday afternoon. Needless to say we didn't go to bed together. Sheelagh was extremely angry with me, accusing me of putting Sissy before her. Going over things I could see how she would feel that way, but I was angry with her for not understanding.

That evening, December 14th, Sheelagh wrote to Montreal requesting the first available date for GRS. To her, what had happened was a signal that our sex life wasn't nearly as important to me as it was to her. She had hoped that the spark that had been ignited on our vacation would stay lit. I didn't feel as strongly as her about this, but I sure as hell did not agree with her decision to book a date for GRS. I felt like she was getting back at me for hurting her earlier. Her new date for GRS was March 30 2015, and I was mad.

One thing about Sheelagh and I, we can get riled up and angry with each other but given a few hours we can come back together and talk like two sane people. We really truly love and respect each other and know neither one is out to purposely hurt the other, so we are always able to find a common ground.

It took a good day for us to come around to each other, but come around we did. We talked through the problem until we got to the GRS part. Sheelagh figured she may as well get the surgery because our sex life was virtually over. She was no longer able to orgasm and she knew I didn't initiate anything because I didn't want to deal with the frustration and sadness.

I could see her point - I really could. I just didn't want to give up all hope and have her lose a part of her anatomy she could never get back. I didn't want to lose it because that would just make everything so final and I found that hard to accept. She said she would keep thinking on it and nothing was written in stone. The fact she was willing to keep an open mind meant a lot to me, and I didn't want her making such a huge decision out of anger.

Puppy Trip

Sheelagh and I made the three hour drive to the kennel that had the little Havanese puppies “just to have a look at them.” In our hearts, we kind of knew at least one, if not both, would have to come home with us at some point. We loved their look, but we wanted to check out their dispositions and how they reacted to us.

Long story short, we fell in love with a little white faced fluffy male puppy. This little one loved being in Sheelagh’s arms and showered her with puppy kisses, and basically fell in love with Sheelagh. Sheelagh was not tough enough to resist the love of the little fluffy, so we were going to have a new little heart beating in our home. We would have to return to pick him up when he became old enough to leave the kennel. It was going to be a long month!

Scottsdale

It was nice to have my happy Sheelagh back because even though we had been home less than three weeks since returning from Hawaii we were now heading to Scottsdale for Christmas. The plans for Scottsdale were made before the plans to go to New Zealand and Hawaii. It was becoming a tradition to go and spend Christmas in Scottsdale.

Our trip down there was easy and uneventful. We went up to Sedona for the first night because we wanted to see the Christmas lights and trees all decorated. We had a wonderful time and enjoyed our hotel room with the fireplace. In the morning we did a little shopping and then headed to the house we had rented for the week in North Scottsdale.

We had to call the owner to figure out how to get into the gated community because we were not sent the complete instructions in the first place. Once we got in, we felt the water in the hot tub which was perfect and then Sheelagh felt the pool temperature and it was very cold. We found the pool remote and turned it to heat and then unloaded the luggage and groceries from the car.

The owner called my cell phone to make sure we managed to get in alright, and I said we had but we had to turn on the pool because it was cold. He

said that the house wasn't rented with a heated pool. Now I was starting to get a little upset with him because the ad for the house specifically said heated pool and hot tub - he said it did not. Sheelagh quickly pulled up the ad on her cell phone and pointed out that was exactly what it said. I told him to read his ad and get back to me, and then I hung up on him.

I hated dealing with stuff like this, but since Sheelagh was uncomfortable talking on the phone because she thought her voice wasn't feminine enough, I ended up dealing with it. The owner called my cell and apologized and said it was a typo and it would take a week to heat a pool that size and way too much money, and that was the reason it wasn't heated. Now I had looked at a lot of houses and the only reason I had picked that house was due to it having a heated pool. I was furious with him. He offered to cut the price in half, but by that time I was so upset I was nearly in tears and didn't want to spend a week in a house staring at a pool I couldn't use, so I told him I wanted a full refund.

He agreed to the refund because it had been his mistake, but now we had to pack up the car again and find a place to stay. I was crying and so frustrated, but Sheelagh was great. She grabbed me in a big hug and held me and told me everything was going to be alright. She said we would go to the hotel we usually stayed at in Scottsdale and see if they had rooms, and if they didn't we could return to Sedona. It was a good plan.

We ended up at the hotel we usually stayed at and got a beautiful suite on the top floor. As luck had it we were just in time for happy hour so everything did work out okay. During our week there we had a lovely time going to new restaurants and visiting Superstition Mountain. One evening we had dinner at the Mexican restaurant next door to our hotel, and ended up walking back with our arms around each other singing a Monkey's song. We may have had one too many margaritas!

The week we spent there was perfect, unfortunately the sex wasn't. Our attempt at lovemaking ended in disappointment and that failure felt like the last small strand of hope had been severed. In my mind I could see GRS rear it's ugly head again. We didn't let it get the best of us and made it back home still smiling and talking, and happy to be together.

CHAPTER FIVE
2015

Transgender Conference

There was a good feeling between us this new year. The time we spent together in Scottsdale brought us closer together. We were good to each other and had fun. The first few days of the new year we talked at length about whether GRS was the right thing to do. An orchiectomy, Sheelagh told me, could satisfy her need to go farther in her transition and still allow us the hope of having a sex life. We had such strong hope, that Sheelagh quickly penned a letter to indefinitely postpone GRS, and contacted a surgeon in Phoenix to discuss having an orchiectomy. I found out later that she didn't actually mail the letter, but she did write it.

A week later, out of the blue, Sheelagh asked me if I wanted to go to Boston and of course I said, "Yes," followed by "Why are we going to Boston?"

She said there was a transgender conference there called First Event. Two of the best transgender specializing surgeons in North America were going to be presenters, one of whom she was considering for an orchiectomy. Sheelagh would also be able to hear what they had to say about the benefits of full GRS versus partial GRS. She would be able to get answers from them without having to go to their individual offices in the US southwest.

I looked at the event's website and the one thing I really liked was that they were also offering workshops for partners of transpeople. I thought I would be able to meet people in the same predicament I was in.

Sheelagh booked everything from the flight and workshops to the hotel, while I found a place for our puppies to stay. On January 23rd, we flew to Boston and made it there for the 11:30 A.M. workshop. I found it to be a real eye-opener. Everyone else at this particular workshop were transpeople. It broke my heart to hear their stories of losing their families, or their jobs. Some had attempted suicide due to being ridiculed and hurt by society in general. No one person's story was the same as another, but Sheelagh's story was so different than most everyone else's - she still had her life, her job and me.

After lunch I attended a group gathering for partners of transpeople and it was amazing to be able to talk to people about my life and have them understand it, as opposed to looking shocked or horrified at me. I met partners of crossdressers and transsexuals who were all in the early stages of the process. The women (it was open to men as well but only women were there that day) who were there loved their partners and were trying their best to come to grips with what was happening to their lives. Some women were considering divorce, others were hoping it was a phase their partners would pass through. I knew where they were coming from because I had been exactly where they were. Throughout the session there was some laughing and crying, but at the end it was comforting to know that I wasn't the only one out there.

It had been a very long day and that night in our hotel room I looked at Sheelagh and thought we were very lucky to still be together after everything we had gone through. I could easily have left her, or she could have said she wanted to be with other people, but here we were together. We found ourselves that snowy night in Boston wrapped up in each others arms.

The next morning we were up and out to the workshops. That morning I had another spousal/partner session which went very well. Sheelagh attended her own workshop and we met up together for lunch. I remember us looking at each other and feeling so happy - we even ordered a bottle of wine with lunch. Ordering wine out is something we don't do because we resent paying the extra restaurant charges on it but today felt special, almost

celebratory. We were surrounded by like minded individuals but we were focused on ourselves because I think we both realized how lucky we were to have each other.

After lunch Sheelagh and I attended the same workshop because it was one for couples. I recognized a lot of women from the morning groups and it was interesting to meet their partners. The women who were so vocal in the morning sat quietly beside their partners as their partners told their story from their perspective. Definitely an eye opening experience, because both sides were so different and many times divided.

One of the women I'd befriended from the morning session was also married to a socially transitioned transwoman. She said it would be great if her spouse and mine could meet each other for this session. Her spouse was a presenter at another workshop, but not one that was happening at the same time as this one.

When the group leader asked whether her partner was coming, she said she was but would be a little late. Her partner never arrived. My friend sat there silently and looked so sad. My heart went out to her. It is so hard to be with a spouse who is different in a world that isn't quick to sympathize. Now here she was, in a safe welcoming environment, sitting alone. Another promise broken.

After the session she wouldn't meet my eyes and was the first one out the door. I never had a chance to say goodbye. Sheelagh and I were able to say our goodbyes to another friend I'd made. We hugged and left with promises of future emails. To this day we are still in contact.

Sheelagh and I made it to Boston before a snowfall and we made it out before a major snowstorm, which turned out to be the start of one of the worst blizzards in fifty years. I was relieved to get back home and pick up our furry little family.

The GRS Discussion

So many times during Sheelagh's transition I defined the limits of what I could accept. As far as I could tell, Sheelagh agreed with those limits.

Along the way some promises were broken. This could look like intentional deception, but for transpeople such transgressions were sometimes unavoidable. Their destiny was set at birth, and the drive to become themselves often took precedent over promises that were made.

Most life partners of transpeople were never taught the word transgender and all that it entailed. The knowledge of transgendered lives is just starting to be understood. Even transgender people are often lost when they try to understand the motivations behind what they are driven to do. This makes life even more confusing for their partners.

Now here we were again discussing another change that Sheelagh had said was off limits, GRS.

At the end of last year she was toying with the idea of having a vulva created, but without a vagina. The surgery to make a vagina was very invasive, so the chances of accidental damage to internal organs and blood vessels would be greatly lowered by not having that part done.
Having a vagina would be an unwanted maintenance problem if there was no sensory value to having one.

At First Event she learned from the GRS surgeons, that having a vagina provides access to a very erotically sensitive area that would not be accessible without a vagina. Sheelagh had always been worried that the procedure could result in some sensory loss. She was happy to learn that when a surgeon has done a lot of GRS procedures the odds of any major complications go down.

Armed with all the new information she found out about the chances of having a climax with a vagina versus only a vulva, she chose the full GRS procedure to have both. She was willing to put up with the increased body maintenance in hope that there would be enough sensation overall so she had a chance of being able to have orgasms afterwards.

I certainly did not want her to have GRS. I knew our sex life wasn't ideal but when things did work it was wonderful. I knew I was being selfish because I knew Sheelagh was extremely unhappy not being able to orgasm, if she had the surgery she had a better chance of having an orgasm. It wasn't that she hated her penis and wanted it gone, it was more like it's not really working anymore so why should it be kept.

She also wasn't comfortable with her bottom half not matching her top half, this was a big stumbling block for her with regards to obtaining medical care. I also believed it affected her confidence and how she saw herself in the world.

Sheelagh and I had a heart to heart talk about our sex life, or lack thereof. She no longer believed spending eight thousand dollars on having an orchiectomy was a good decision when she would probably end up having GRS anyways. She made it clear she needed the operation to complete her transition.

I knew this talk was coming, so I can't say I was surprised. I had now approached my line in the sand. There was no escaping from it.
To me this surgery would be so final. The true end of any semblance of heterosexual sex. I didn't want to have to deal with the intricacies of sex with a woman, I just wanted to keep the status quo. (Yes I know sex with a transsexual is not the status quo - but it was for me.) In the end I knew it really wasn't my decision to make because it wasn't my body. Sheelagh had her path to follow and that looked like it would include having GRS, and I guess I either accepted that as part of my life or I left and continued on without her.

A life without Sheelagh was impossible. I felt sad and unhappy with the thought of her having GRS, but I would be more unhappy living without her. I understand the saying that no one can make you happy, you have to make yourself happy, but I wasn't happy. I believed with time I could be. The best way to appreciate someone is to imagine your life without them.

I hope that this surgery will be her last one. It will be the sixth surgical procedure she's undergone in the past four years. So far she has survived

the procedures (which is kind of obvious, since I’m still writing about us), but she has had difficult recoveries and one failed procedure.

What GRS is About

GRS is an abbreviation for genital reconstruction surgery. This surgery used to be called sex-change surgery, but the changing is not sex or gender; it is genital only. The term is more correct about its purpose and effect since the transperson is certain of their gender. It is how the world views them that can change as a result of the procedure.

Most states, provinces and countries that support the changing of sex designation on a birth certificate require proof of GRS in order to make the change to the paperwork.

The variety of GRS that Sheelagh was planning to undergo is referred to as “male-to-female". More exactly penis-to-vagina conversion, and in that change the common definition of what is female can then be applied to the person who has been successfully operated on.
In the eyes of people who are not transsexual, the surgery is considered to be the procedure that allows them to view the affected person as a member of the sex that they identify with. The transsexual person regards this as a momentous and life changing event, but transwomen already see themselves as female, and transmen know themselves as male.

This surgery can be a huge turning point in a transperson’s life.

Genital Reconstruction Surgery

Preparing

The date for Sheelagh’s surgery was quickly approaching which meant she had to stop all her pain medication as well as all the vitamins and supplements she was on. She had chronic back pain, so the loss of the pain medication made a big difference to her quality of life.

It was soon the last weekend she could have a drink, because after the surgery there was no alcohol allowed for three weeks. We shared our good and inexpensive Cabernet Sauvignon and Negroamaro wine all three nights, and accompanied the wine with good aged cheese. Her Weight Watcher's program definitely went out the window!

I knew Sheelagh was excited but also nervous about the impending operation. We knew transsexual women who had looked forward with great anticipation to having GRS. The pervasive myth is that transsexual women hate their penises and want to be rid of them, so the thought of the removal of that part of their body is a great relief to them.

In most of the world, this surgery is what will allow them to be known to the world as a woman and no longer as a man. Many transwomen are on their own, divorced or never married, and younger in comparison to Sheelagh. Sacrificing this part of her body wasn't as easy for her as it might have been if she were younger.

She had spent many years living in the body she'd been stuck with and had found ways to enjoy what she had, though it wasn't perfect. She also had me, someone who loved and cared about her and the sex life we had enjoyed in the past. She definitely still agonized about making the final decision about having GRS.

She had come across a list of questions that were meant to help someone know whether they were making the right choice:

- Will this choice propel me toward an inspiring future or will it keep me stuck in the past?
- Will this choice bring me long term fulfillment or will it bring me short term gratification?
- Am I standing in my own power or am I trying to please another?
- Am I looking for what's right, or am I looking for what's wrong?
- Will this choice add to my life force, or will it rob me of my energy?
- Will I use this situation as a catalyst to grow and evolve or will I use it to beat myself up?

- Does this choice empower me or dis-empower me?
- Is this an act of self-love or self-sabotage?
- Is this an act of faith or an act of fear?
- Am I choosing from my Divinity or am I choosing from my humanity?

To all the questions, she easily answered yes and was satisfied she was making the right choice. Even with this knowledge she still experienced some unidentifiable anxiety. She was nervous that she wouldn't have enough nerve endings left after the surgery to enjoy intimacy. She was also feeling a sense of loss because she would no longer experience connective sex and the closeness that goes with it. Then on top of that she was nervous that she would be the oldest patient in the hospital and have no one to relate to.

Sheelagh was feeling better than she had three weeks ago. Since then she had finally come to believe that even with the insecurities I was experiencing, I wasn't going to leave her. I had been worried that since she planned to have full GRS, that she would be unable to resist the temptation to try out her new female genitals with women or even other men. I knew it was never her plan to be disloyal. It was just one of those thoughts that niggled in the back of my mind.

In order to get ready for Montreal Sheelagh made an appointment with a new hair stylist. The last appointment she had with a stylist was in 2012. Since that time she had been cutting her own hair. The last appointment had not gone well because the stylist talked to her as if she had the interests of a man. She talked about cars and sports which made Sheelagh feel like she was being treated like a man in a dress. Since then Sheelagh had undergone two hair transplants in the hope of never being embarrassed in that way again.

The new hair stylist she went to spent three hours with her. Her hair was now a very realistic golden-honey blonde with lots of depth. She was able to retire her wig and has been au natural since that day at the hairdressers. She looked amazing and said she felt great! She firmly believed that the cost and inconvenience of the hair transplants were well worth it.

When Sheelagh was preparing to leave for Montreal for the surgery, I was still not sure how I felt about it. Part of me felt that since the male parts didn't work then they may as well go away. Then there's the other part of me that feels this surgery would make everything too final. I know in my head that Sheelagh is a woman, but a little tiny piece of my heart still glimmered ever so slightly, with the hope of her changing back to Steve. A total fairy tale, but once GRS takes place that's it - end of story.

She has said quite often in the past that if I wasn't with her she would have this surgery. So there's the answer - no matter what - she needed this procedure for her life to be complete. It's just not what I needed.

We both thought about having sex one last time, but if we did and it didn't work it would be very sad. If we did and it did work it would be even sadder. In the end we settled on cuddles and falling asleep in each other's arms.

The next morning we awoke earlier than usual and moved next to one another, wrapped our arms around each other in the dark and whispered words of love. We lay there quietly, enjoying one another's warmth, presence and the sound of our gentle heartbeats. That was the last time we could be close until she returned. It brought tears to my eyes and I knew I was going to miss her so very much.

After her good byes to the puppies and getting her suitcase and things loaded into the car we were off to the train station. We had half an hour to wait and the time passed too quickly. Next thing I knew we were standing on the platform and the train was arriving. We held on to each other and shared a very tender kiss and then with one last hug she was on the train and on her way to Montreal. I headed back to my car and sat inside and just cried and cried. I cried because I knew I would miss her and I cried for what would never be.

I went back home and got all three dogs ready to go to the kennel. It's a lot of work when you only have yourself to rely on. I finally got them wrangled into the car with all their paraphernalia and dropped them off at the place they would call home for the following eleven days. The two older dogs

took off without a backwards glance, but the little guy just kept staring at me and wanting to come with me. That of course brought on another crying jag complete with guilt.

I had the house to myself - no one to worry about or look after except myself - now that was a feeling I didn't get to experience very often. I enjoyed the solitude and peacefulness. I drank my way slowly through a bottle of wine, awesome pizza and popcorn, and had a pretty good evening.

The next day I loaded up my stuff to spend a week in St. Catharines with Sissy and Peeter. A time to reconnoiter, not be alone, and be pampered for a little while. At my sister's it's always about good food, fine wine, and fun company. It was a place where I could take time out for me and come to grips with everything.

Most days I was fine and it was fun being with family and seeing my nephew's new house, but the odd day I needed to be alone. On Wednesday I drove to Niagara-on-the-Lake where my parents were buried. My mom had died only twenty-one months ago and seeing both their names on the grave stone just brought another wave of sadness. I sat on one of the benches and cried until I was all cried out. Thankfully I was the only one there at the time.

I felt so utterly alone. No mom and dad, no husband, no nothing, just me. I was definitely having a pity party. I finally got too cold sitting there and made my way back to the car and then to Sissy's place. Staying there was a good choice. I needed the presence of people to get my mind redirected to other things and feelings.

The days were filled with shopping, and visits, and the evenings were full of food, wine and good conversation. Every day I was in touch with Sheelagh by texting, talking or emailing.

Her surgery went very well. By day two she was up and walking around the halls. The nurse was pleased with Sheelagh's recovery. The next day she was moved to the recovery house and had to do stairs and get around on her own. She wasn't in pain as much as she was in discomfort due to the

swelling and tenderness. She made friends with the other GRS patients. It was good for her to be out of her comfort zone and in a position where she had to talk to strangers.

I remember asking her after she had had her breast augmentation done, if she felt weird having boobs.

She told me, “Not one bit, they just felt right.” She said she wasn't changed so much as restored. Her response about how she felt after the GRS was just the same as then. She said she was now in the right body.

Eleven days later and Sheelagh was headed back home. This time she was booked into business class so she would have more room and comfortable seats. I returned home and Sissy came with me to help out. She was there for puppy support as well as moral support. Thank goodness for sisters!

I wasn’t entirely sure what to expect when Sheelagh returned home. I knew she would be tired from travelling, but hopefully she would be happy to be back. Sheelagh was the second person off the train, once we collected her suitcase there were big hugs and kisses, we didn’t care who was watching us. Sheelagh was excited to be back, and I was excited to have her home. She was running on adrenaline, talking a mile a minute and walking all over the house.

After having some tea and cookies we went upstairs and set up her tray of goodies from dilators to douches. By this time Sheelagh was starting to run out of steam and was ready for a nap. She would need it because the post surgery process takes a lot of time and dedication. She would have to dilate four times a day, have a shower every morning, followed by two sitz baths, one in the afternoon and one in the evening.

At this point in time I was feeling okay with the whole thing. The first time Sheelagh showed me her surgery site it was an eye opening experience. If you took away the bruises and swelling you would never know there was ever a penis there because the work was done so well. I noticed Sheelagh stealing glances my way to gauge my feelings. I think she was worried I

would be grossed out or judge her harshly. I was fine because I knew she was happy with the outcome and would just blossom from here on out.

I knew I would be on a constant learning curve regarding physical intimacy with Sheelagh since she had GRS, but one thing for sure was my love for her had not changed. She is my heart stone, and together we will always be Team May. This was a story of our love and would always be our love story.

Now you would think this was a logical and anticipated ending, but an ending it wasn't.

Sheelagh came down off her endorphin high and settled into her routine. She was a lot more ambulatory and aware than I thought she would be. Sissy was still staying with us but there really wasn't anything for her to do. Sheelagh didn't need my help so I was free to look after the puppies and make the meals. Sheelagh felt uncomfortable having Sissy there because she was used to being able to walk around naked at the recovery house, but she couldn't do it in her own home. Therefore Sissy left early to return to her family and Sheelagh got her house back.

On day five of being home Sheelagh became worried about how she was healing. Some stitches had come out much sooner than she was expecting them to. Miscommunication with medical people had her very concerned that an incision had broken open. One of her friends that had GRS at the same time as she did, developed a serious infection and was in a hospital out west. This weighed heavily on Sheelagh's mind because she thought it could happen to her as well.

The hole that had opened when the stitches released should have been mending together, but it was actually getting bigger. We took pictures and sent them to the nursing staff at recovery house. When we heard back from the nurses they told Sheelagh everything looked fine and the hole would heal from the inside out. Sheelagh wasn't happy with their answer but went along with it.

The next night after some wine and dinner we had a pretty big fight. What you have to know is that Sheelagh very seldom argues or raises her voice with me. Over supper she said she wanted us to laugh more like she did with her roommate from the recovery house, and she wanted me to ‘lighten up’ with regards to various slang terms for vagina. I am way past using silly terms such as pussy and kitty.

Naturally, that got my back up. I got angry with her for wanting me to change even more than I already had. It just got uglier from there. It was one of those unfortunate times I got caught up in the fight instead of looking for the reason behind the words. We did eventually end up apologizing to each other and went to bed on good terms

Over the next few days Sheelagh remained concerned because more stitches were coming out, and the opening wasn’t closing. She contacted the nurses again and eventually received a phone call from one of the doctors. The doctor clarified that there never was a problem worth being so alarmed about. Sheelagh’s body was healing faster than average and what was happening was supposed to happen. We were extremely relieved to have our worries put to rest.

Final Words

It's not uncommon for people who have completed GRS to get the blues. They often view having GRS as the event that finalizes their transition and have spent years doing what is needed to prepare for it, then it is over. So much focus and effort, and its finally over. Sheelagh seemed more relieved and at peace than blue. I guess that shouldn’t come as a surprise because Sheelagh always has been one of a kind!

Sheelagh returned from her last appointment with her endocrinologist, and he wished her well on returning to work and losing weight. She left the appointment feeling happy - her transition was complete. When returning to her car she felt confident and didn’t care when shorter women looked her way.

Sheelagh was now a woman in body and soul. I was happy for her. The part of Sheelagh that I loved when I met her was still there. No longer was she keeping a part of herself from the world and from me. Now the love that had been there from the beginning was purer because there was nothing left to hide.

It was a hell of a journey and I’m glad we have come to the end. Writing this book brought back many painful and difficult times, but one thing this story has always been is a love story.

A true love story that never ends.

If you enjoyed my story or it helped you in any way would you please leave a nice review of the book. After all, every good review helps.